BOOK AWARD ISSUE

- Tom Wolfe: a question of courage
- The case against the ACLU
- I was a Chicago Ward Heeler
- The best and worst of public interest groups

The Washington Monthly

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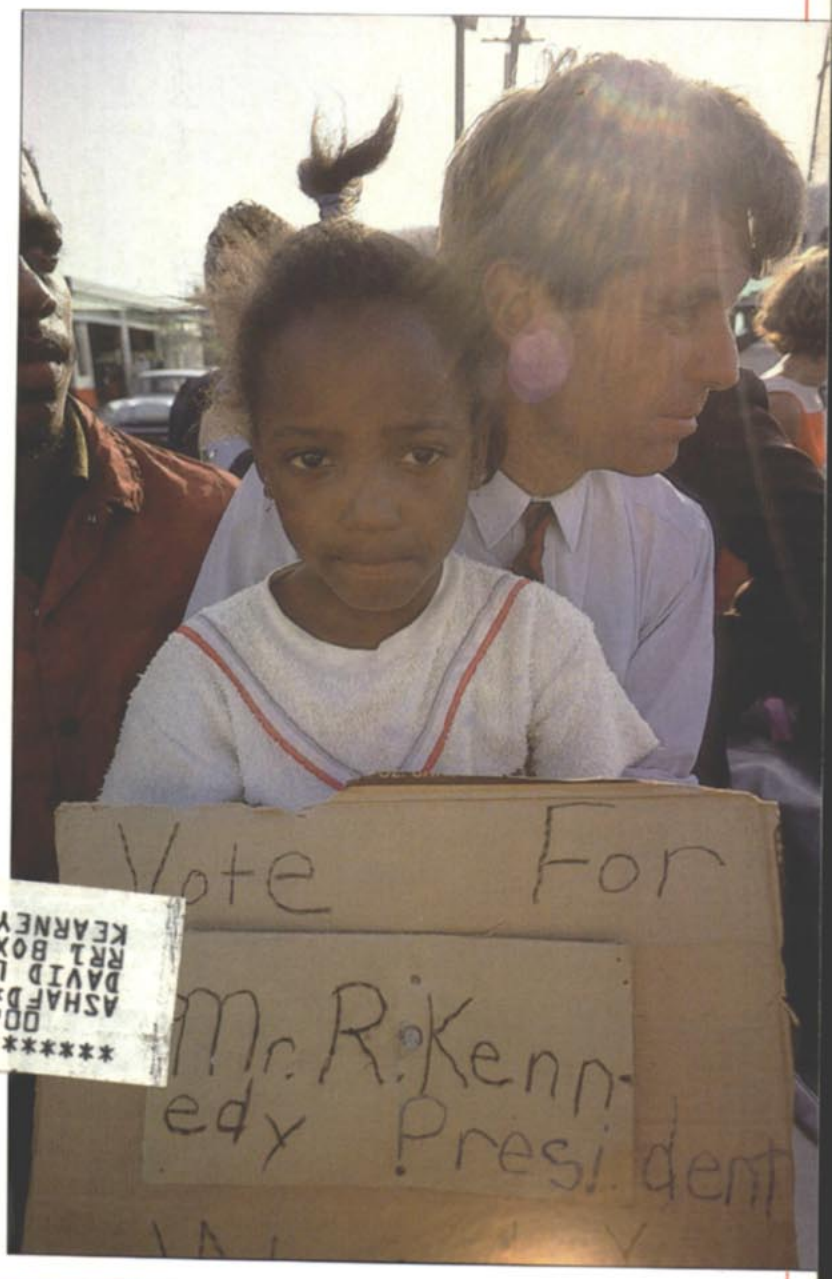

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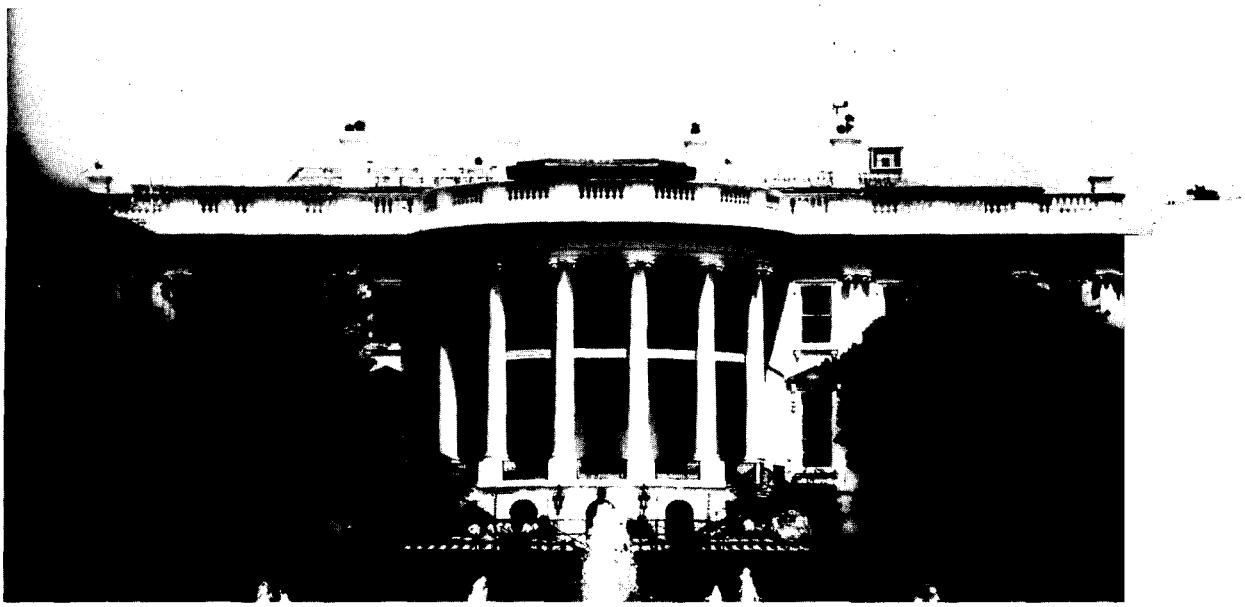

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LETTERS

George Shultz part III

I hate to correct the editors of two of my favorite magazines, but the undoubted physiognomic similarities between George Shultz and the Cowardly Lion were first exposed by neither *The Washington Monthly* nor by *Spy*, as Kurt Andersen maintained in your letters column [December]. The likeness was first demonstrated, irrefutably, by our own (and, come to think of it, your own) Tom Bethell, in the September 1985 issue of *The American Spectator*.

ANDREW FERGUSON
Arlington, Virginia

Mr. Ferguson is assistant managing editor of The American Spectator. *Tom Bethell is a former editor of* The Washington Monthly.

Yale men don't cook data

Your "Tilting at Windmills" column [January] contained an interesting item. While commenting upon some educational test statistics which seemed unlikely, you were reminded of "a 25th anniversary survey of a Yale class in which one-third of its alumni said they ranked in the top quarter of the class. . . ."

First of all, the "top quarter" is based upon the whole class. Out of, say, 1,000 graduating Yalies, 250 constitute the top quarter. The issue is, what happens over the ensuing quarter century to the 250 who *were* versus the 750 who *weren't* in that top quarter.

First, the smart students might live longer, in which case they would be over-represented in any survey of alumni a quarter century later. Second, smarter students may be more easily reached so many years after graduation. Third, smarter alumni may be more likely to respond to a survey. For these and other reasons, it is easy to contemplate a survey covering 600 25-year Yale alumni—180 of the original top 250 and 420 of the other 750. The result is that, of 600 alumni surveyed, 30 percent would truthfully reply they were in the top quarter.

Please, Mr. Peters, we have enough trouble realizing when data is being "cooked" for ulterior motives without your implying manipulation where none exists.

DAN C. HELDMAN
Manassas, Virginia

Those who can't

You say: "Public school administration in the United States is for the most part in the hands of a self-perpetuating group of overpaid, marginally competent bureaucrats who lack the courage, the drive, and the imagination to do what is needed to reform the institutions for which they are responsible" ["Tilting at Windmills," January]. In the same column, you also take another shot at teachers and their professional organizations for resisting "tougher teacher evaluations."

Connect the two. The reason teachers resist evaluation systems is that the evaluations are conducted by school administrators who are generally too incompetent to accurately evaluate teaching and who cannot be trusted to treat teachers with fairness. The truly professional teacher who cares enough about education to take on a school's ship-of-fools administration is especially vulnerable.

School administrators already do their best to bring good teachers to their knees with their pandering to popular extracurricular activities, their spineless failure to support teachers in dealings with parents, and their overriding emphasis on form over substance in all things educational. Let's not give them another tool to backstab good teachers who place quality education ahead of making life easy for administrators.

You have often derided the system of teacher certification in this country, saying that subject expertise and teacher commitment should weigh more than audits of college courses in teaching methodology and other "education" subjects. What do you think the criteria are for teacher evaluations? The evaluation basis is methodology, not content or effectiveness.

School administrators are the end-product of the cookie-cutter system of teacher education that you decry. We should not expect an evaluation system developed and administered by bureaucrats to be better than the systems they run. Teachers know this, and that's why they think "tougher teacher evaluations" are bullshit.

JOHN L. BYRON
Arlington, Virginia

Charles Peters replies:

Instead of resisting evaluation of any kind, teachers should encourage school boards to create tough but fair teams of evaluators that would include teachers and that would evaluate both administrators and teachers so we can get rid of the bad apples in both groups.

Beefcake

While Phillip Keisling appropriately chastises the press, in his foreword and by doing the job they failed to do [in covering the Democratic candidate's stands on the issues], he diminishes his work with the cavalier dismissal that Republican candidates have little of value to contribute to the debate ["Where's the Beef," January]. First, such offhand conclusions fail the journalist's responsibility to let the reader decide. Second, it taints the author—and by association the magazine—as being too partisan to be given much credence.

Nonetheless, Keisling's story is far and away the best piece of reporting I've seen on the 1988 campaign. Instead of arguing whether we should be covering personalities or issues, it covers the issues.

GEORGE LIPPER
Macomb, Illinois

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Thanks to Phillip Keisling for pulling together in one article the substance (or lack thereof) of the Democratic presidential candidates' approaches to important issues. As I had already come to single out Bruce Babbitt for support, I was delighted with his score card (two times better than the others).

In common with the rest of the press, however, Mr. Keisling asked no questions about one major topic: the environment—an issue apparently more important to the public than to the press. Poll after poll reveals that Americans want environmental protection and are willing to pay for it. Fortunately, Gov. Babbitt (a geologist by training, an enthusiastic conservationist by avocation) understands environmental concerns and has a fine record in this regard. He has a well-thought-out energy policy—he was on the Kemeny (Three Mile Island) Commission—and clear environmental policies.

In addition to all his other strengths well illustrated in your article, Babbitt is the strongest environmentalist in the race; I suggest he rates an "A" there, too.

DOOLEY KIEFER
Ithaca, New York

In his article, Phillip Keisling misconstrues the purpose of education courses. Of course there is no content—they are designed that way deliberately. Patience is one of the prime requisites for a teacher, and these courses really test that quality. Anyone who can complete 30 semester hours of education courses has all the patience required to teach anyone.

RICHARD LOTRECK
Natick, Massachusetts

Mean testing

In "Tilting at Windmills" [January], you say "The truth is that most of the elderly are no longer deserving in the sense of being needy—they are better off than the rest of us." You then advocate full taxation on Social Security benefits for the affluent elderly. Such a statement shows a startling ignorance of the subject and this reflects on your publication.

Much depends on your definition of "affluent." The dictionary says it means "having an abundance of goods; wealthy; magnificently impressive." I do not know any railroad men who are affluent. Right now, any couple under railroad retirement who has an income of over $32,000 pays taxes on all "tier two" benefits and up to half of their "tier one" benefits. So, in effect, they are paying taxes on half or more of their benefits. Are they affluent? If they had to go into a nursing home it would cost at least $60,000 a year. If they do not have an income of $60,000 a year, their estate will gradually diminish until they are on welfare and Medicaid. Isn't that a fine reward for a lifetime of work and saving?

My wife and I were married in the Depression and know what it is like to have no job, no unemployment benefits, and no welfare. We tried all our lives to prepare for old age. In 1935 our income was $2,086.87,

The Washington Monthly

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but we saved $295.

When we started paying into the railroad retirement fund we saw no footnote saying "Spend everything you make. If you do not do this you may have to pay taxes on all your benefits."

Do you also advocate taxing life insurance payments by the insurance companies based on the affluence of the insured?

H.L. KIRK
Marquette, Michigan

Charles Peters, you seem preoccupied with a plan to establish "needs testing" as the basis for taxation of full Social Security benefits.

Is Mr. Peters aware that a number of senior citizens—approximately 10 percent of the elderly population—are now subjected to a means test in which they pay taxes on one-half of their Social Security benefits?

Does he understand that in so doing the federal government has broken a solemn promise that Social Security would not be taxed, either directly or indirectly?

Is he aware that most of these people are now facing serious old age health problems requiring ever-increasing expenditures? By 1991, elderly out-of-pocket health care spending will grow to $2,633 a year and the prospect of nursing home care is frightening.

You seek to impose upon the aged an additional burden by establishing needs testing. For shame, Mr. Peters, for shame!

One can empathize with your concern for the federal budget. However, you overlook the fact that a number of prominent D.C. observers (including our President Ronald Reagan) maintain that the Social Security Trust was set up as a separate fund not to be comingled with the general fund. They indicate further that the Social Security Trust will remain fiscally secure into the twenty-first century.

You persistently dwell upon those retirees, who, by hard work and frugal self-denial, have managed to rise above the poverty level to a life of relative comfort. Instead, why not go after the triple-dippers who retire from civil service jobs after 20 years, take jobs in private industry, and thus qualify for Social Security benefits, and the "Golden Parachutists" who retire with bonanza bonuses.

HUGH CRAYNE
North White Plains, New York

Charles Peters replies:

I am aware of the partial tax, but I want to take more from the affluent. I am aware of no solemn promise. None exists. I am also aware of the burden the expense of health care imposes on the elderly who are not well-off. That's why I want to help them by taking from the rich. *The Washington Monthly* has criticized the triple-dippers, golden parachutists, and every other group we know of that receives compensation that is either unneeded, undeserved, or both.

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Alcoholism and libel

As a journalist specializing in rock and roll musicians, I have encountered the problems described in your article on alcoholism and politicians ["Governing Under the Influence," Steven Waldman, January], although the stigma of addiction is traditionally less of a career crippler in music. I was disappointed that you did not address the problem of libel. Ever since Carol Burnett won her suit against *The National Enquirer* for their saying she was intoxicated at a party, lawyers routinely excise any reference to a person being drunk or addicted unless the reporter has the person confessing to it on tape. If the subject is in a state of denial, or just greedy, it is very easy to get sued even if you've personally seen the subject puking on his shoes.

Fear of libel law keeps the discussion of drug use confined to a high level of hysteria defined by Nancy Reagan types and recent converts to sobriety. If Wilbur Mills truly believes that "no alcoholic should be shielded," let him work to decriminalize our drug laws and have alcoholism and addiction classified legally as non-libelous diseases. Only then will the next Wilbur Mills be written about honestly before he's found in the Tidal Basin. Look at your own article: if alcoholics are such a problem in Congress, why did you not expose a single new one?

CHARLES M. YOUNG
New York, New York

Mr. Young is a contributing editor of Musician *magazine.*

Steven Waldman replies:

Writing about alcohol abuse is difficult but not impossible. No reporter I talked to mentioned fear of libel as the reason they avoided writing about it. Political journalists seem more deterred by the difficulty of proving that alcohol consumption was affecting job performance or by a belief that most drinking problems are simply not newsworthy. You are right to ask why I didn't expose any new alcoholics. My answer is that it was failure of my own reporting, not a fear of libel. This is not proof that reporting about alcohol abuse is impossible or that Washington harbors no alcoholics (although I did not name *new* names, I did name names, quote witnesses, and cite statistics enough, I hope, to demonstrate there is a problem). The increased coverage of whether Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has a drinking problem shows that, as journalistic ground rules change, reporters will write about drinking more readily. That is a hopeful sign.

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TILTING AT WINDMILLS

In the 1970s Liggett developed a cigarette that contained an additive designed to protect smokers from lung cancer. Why didn't it market the cigarette? Because its lawyers said doing so would constitute an admission that its other products were unsafe. The truly horrible thing lawyers have done to our national life is to create situations like this where one lawyer says we can't do the right thing because another lawyer would sue us.

I know that many times in these pages I have appeared to be harsh on lawyers. Often that is my precise intention. But I always feel guilty when I fail to acknowledge that at least a few of them really are dedicated to freeing the innocent, prosecuting the guilty, and defending the Constitution. I should also acknowledge the reasonable lawyers—the natural mediators who nobly resist the adversarial imperatives of the law. Often they have difficulty with their clients who want them to be mean and nasty. I remember one fellow who asked me to recommend a new lawyer to represent him in his divorce case. He said, "I'm fed up with the guy I've got, he's always telling me I should understand my wife's side."

The problem is that clients are often so filled with the righteousness of their cause that they resist all appeals to reason. I must confess that this happened to me once. Nicholas Lemann, who was then an editor of the *Monthly*, and I were being sued by some aggrieved author, and Michael Kinsley, one of our former editors who was then just out of law school, volunteered to represent us. The judge, having heard the facts, recommended mediation. Kinsley urged me to go along. I said, "Michael, I don't want to be reasonable, I want justice."...

How do those supermarket tabloids unearth the celebrity scandals they write about each week? A tabloid writer recently revealed one of the secrets of their success to an interviewer:

"A star's agent is usually a great source of dirt about his own client, especially if the client is on the way down. He'll sell the star out to get space for his next client."...

What does it say about the behavior of our corporate and government bureaucracies that Educational Technology Consortium, Inc. thinks it can make money offering a training program called "Dealing with the Angry Public."...

If Bruce Babbitt can't win the Democratic nomination, and as this is written his prospects appear less than electrifying, my candidate is Albert Gore. The reasons for supporting him are in John Eisendrath's article, "The Long, Long Shot," that we published in November 1986.

Gore is a bit more conservative, or more cynical in courting southern votes—it is hard to tell which—than I would like. My only other reservations about him are that he has never known defeat, an experience that tends to increase humility and understanding, and that, while he has a splendid wit where others are concerned—remember "Jesse Jackson is the candidate of the South, South Chicago, that is"—he has little sense of humor about himself. There may have been a note of wistful envy in a remark about another candidate that Gore's campaign manager made to a reporter last month: "There is no doubt that Babbitt is a likable man with a sense of humor and especially a sense of humor about himself."

But on the crucial test of who can deal with Gorbachev, I think Gore would be the equal of Kennedy with Khrushchev at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. And I can't say that of any of the other candidates except Bob Dole, who is far too conservative and whose suspicious loner qualities would make it impossible for

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him to run the government effectively....

Speaking of Babbitt, did you see those pictures of him the Saturday before the Iowa caucuses, outfitted in a crazy-looking helmet and mask and riding a bike in zero weather? When someone said to Michael McCurry, Babbitt's press secretary, "Do you realize that [Babbitt] will be on national television looking like a space alien," McCurry replied, "Well, at least he will be on." It's hard to believe, but otherwise rational people really get to thinking like that during political campaigns....

From our Only in California Department, I offer this headline from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of January 12, 1988:

Oakland Teachers Fight for Face Lifts

And in case you're saying, I don't believe it, Peters has to be pulling my leg, here's the first paragraph of the story:

"Oakland teachers are holding fast to their unused health care benefits that have allowed them to undergo elective cosmetic surgery at the expense of the financially strapped school district."

At the Santa Clara County minimum security jail, inmates have been buying furloughs. That's right, they get an hour out of jail for each dollar they contribute to the construction of a weight room at the facility.

And last, but not least, the California Computer Crime Law exempts from punishment crimes committed by "employees engaged in designated labor union activity."...

Almost everyone agrees that program trading was a factor in the crash of October 19. But you can be sure that efforts to take effective action against it will encounter fierce opposition. Wall Street firms make big profits using stock index arbitrage, which is a form of program trading, in managing their own money. It is estimated that stock index arbitrage now accounts for one-fourth of all the trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

With giant firms like Morgan Stanley involved and determined to resist reform, strong pressure from the public is going to be needed to bring it about. Write your congressman now....

Did you know that mortgage payments now take more than $1,000 a month from the average homebuyer's income, which is not good news for young people who want to get married, have children, and live in their own home—without having to sell their souls for the sake of lucrative employment.

Another cost that's rising is what we pay for hospital care. The average charge went up 19 percent last year. With the rate of inflation at only about 4 percent, that seems outrageous.

What seems even more outrageous is that care that costs less than $400 a day in Alexandria, Virginia and Niagara Falls, New York, costs more than $1,000 in Reno, Nevada and San Jose, California....

It is interesting that neither Michael Deaver's lawyers nor Lyn Nofziger's chose to let their clients testify. While lawyers will often, as these did, give other excuses for this omission, the main reason nine times out of ten is that they think the client's testimony will damage his own case....

Why the shortage of nurses? A change in cultural

DOES THE DEFICIT MATTER?

BALANCED BUDGETS AND AMERICAN POLITICS

By **JAMES D. SAVAGE**

"Likely to be considered a classic from the moment it is published."—Stanley E. Collender, Touche Ross & Co.

Since the stock market crash in October, reducing the federal government's budget deficit has become a top priority among our nation's leaders. A topical issue but hardly a new one, balancing the federal budget has been a perennial source of conflict in American political life. James D. Savage here explores the causes and development of this issue, arguing that the American fascination with the idea of balancing the federal budget is deeply rooted and reflects more than a contemporary concern about inflation, interest rates, depression, or even the outcome of the ongoing budget debate. $27.95

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values is one major reason. A recent survey of students entering college, reported in *The Washington Post*, indicates that they are interested in careers associated with status, power, and money.

Obviously these values must change if we are to have more nurses. But there is another change that is also important, one recommended by Donna Fenn in these pages several years ago. It is to establish programs that permit nurses to grow professionally by being allowed to perform—and be paid fairly for—some of the functions usually done only by doctors. Unofficially, and without fair pay, talented nurses often have covered for their doctors and done things like suturing that the doctors were supposed to be doing. If young people who are considering a nursing career could know that such work could be done publicly and recognized and rewarded, and that they could be trained for it by in-service work-study programs, the profession would have an appeal it now lacks.

There is nowhere in American life that sexism has been more troubling than in the attitude of the male physician toward the female nurse. He has used her as either a servant or a sex object. It's time that we made the nurse and the doctor equal. The money to pay the nurses more should come from the doctors, who are now earning more than they deserve, not from the patients or the taxpayers....

My admiration for my friend and former colleague, Gregg Easterbrook, is almost unlimited. He has been right repeatedly when practically everyone else has been wrong. But on rare occasions his contrarian approach doesn't work. Such is the case with his article in *The New Republic* last autumn, entitled "The Sky Isn't Falling," that began, "Since deregulation, U.S. air travel has become safer and cheaper."

Cheaper, maybe—at least on long-distance flights—but *safer*? If the sky isn't falling, planes certainly are. In January, the Associated Press reported:

"Major U.S. airlines in 1987 had the highest number of accidents in 13 years and the most deaths in five years, while commuter carriers had their worst safety record of this decade."...

In this month's story on the ACLU (page 27) we talk about the McCarran-Walter Act, a McCarthy-era law that gives the State Department the power—one it frequently uses—to deny foreigners the permission to visit the U.S. because of their political beliefs. Foreigners can appeal the denial, and in most cases they receive a waiver. But when issuing the visa, the State Department, still suspicious, puts a mark on the foreigner's passport identifying him or her as having received the waiver.

Now, as I reported last month, the State Department is fighting a plan by the Customs Service to similarly mark the passports of Americans caught trying to enter the U.S. with illegal drugs. Customs says the plan would alert its agents to give the person's luggage special attention. State claims marking the passport would interfere with the "integrity of the document." This remark should win State an award for hypocrisy. It's also backward policy. America has nothing to fear from the opinions of visiting foreigners. It has plenty to fear from the illegal drugs smuggled in by its own citizens....

The Defense Department has decided to treat as veterans the civilians who served in the merchant marine during World War II. While many of these seamen did risk their lives, I can see how this decision would curl the hair of Navy veterans who were paid far less for work that was also hazardous and who were in for the duration and not free to quit or take long vacations as the merchant seamen were....

Some months ago we told you how the executive jet and two other aircraft owned by the Army Corps of Engineers seemed to be devoted less to essential business than to pleasurable jaunts in this country and abroad. Army auditors estimated that selling the planes would bring in more than $6 million to the Treasury and that, in addition, the use of commercial airlines would save $1 million a year. So were the planes sold? Of course not. They were saved by a provision forbidding their sale that was slipped into the 1987 spending bill by Rep. Tom Bevill. It seems that the congressman had

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used the jet for a visit to Hawaii. He must have enjoyed the trip....

I have an apology to Gary Hart and a rebuke for the Postal Service. Hart was leading or near the top of the polls at the time we went to press with last month's issue, which criticized his relationship with William Broadhurst. But because of the incompetence of the Postal Service, many copies, including those for Washington, D.C., didn't reach our subscribers until more than two weeks after they had been mailed from our printer in Pennsylvania. By that time Hart was down to 1 percent in Iowa and we appeared to be picking on a man who was already down and out.

As for the Postal Service, its record on delivering the *Monthly* has steadily worsened over the past couple of years, despite our repeated complaints and their repeated assurances of reform. It's funny that they deliver *Time* and *Newsweek* a day after mailing but take a week or two or longer to deliver us, even though we pay the same postage. Could it have something to do with the fact that they fear criticism from the media giants much more than from a gnat like *The Washington Monthly*?...

For those of you who have been worried about what to wear with your C.D. Peacock all-diamond tennis bracelet, the jeweler has mercifully provided a ruby tennis bracelet as a "perfect companion." It's yours for $3,250....

You have to admire the creativity that the potential income from tax-deductible conferences has inspired in the travel industry. The Royal Viking *Star* is offering a China/Orient Conference on Legal-Medical Issues. This *21-day* trip will be financed by you and me and other taxpayers because of the *28 hours* that its participants will devote to study. The worthy social objective that will be attained is teaching them how to avoid civil and criminal liability for their mistakes....

The Reagan administration is playing bad politics with two agencies that should be treated as important sources of information whose objectivity should be treasured rather than tampered with. One is the Office of Management and Budget, where budget examiners are being asked to put an administration "spin" on their analyses. The other is the Census Bureau, from which Dr. Barbara Bailar recently resigned because of a decision that will result in an undercount of blacks and Hispanics and that will almost certainly cause a loss of House seats and federal aid for states with large numbers of blacks and Hispanics in their population.

An administration should be able to choose its policies—the rest of us are free to oppose them in Congress, in the courts, and with our ballots—but it should not be permitted to choose its facts or play around with the data base upon which other branches of the government and private citizens depend. And government can ill-afford to lose the services of competent professsionals like Dr. Bailar, who are disillusioned by their superiors' willingness to distort or conceal the truth.

Paul Volcker says there are three reasons why we lose good civil servants: low pay, political patronage, and lack of excitement. He is mostly wrong about the first two, although there are a few jobs where higher salaries are needed, and although the Reagan administration has used miserable judgment in making many of its political appointments. But money isn't everything. I worked in an administration—John Kennedy's—where the pay was much worse but morale and performance levels were much higher than today. Nor is patronage a major factor—it accounts for less than 1 percent of the federal work force. Volcker *is* right about the importance of excitement. But even more important, I think, is respect. You need to respect the people you work for, and you can't respect people who change facts, as the Reaganites do....

It used to be that journalists identified with the working class because they were members. They may not have worn blue collars, but they were paid blue-collar wages. That this situation has changed is suggested by the fact that one of the advertisers in the current issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* is Mercedes-Benz....

—*Charles Peters*

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Tearing down posters, packing press kits, and other campaign adventures

I Was a Chicago Ward Heeler

by John Eisendrath

The cop savors the possible headline. "Candidate's brother arrested tearing down opponent's posters," he says. When he pulled the squad car to the curb moments earlier and asked for my driver's license, I contemplated gift-wrapping it in a twenty. *That* would be a headline.

Six weeks earlier I had been a political journalist in Washington. Rarely leaving the office, I opined about how the government was mismanaging its finances and whether certain politicians were presidential material. I have never worked in government and had long since given up trying to balance my checkbook. My experience working for a politician was limited to a month-long Capitol Hill internship, which consisted primarily of carrying the congressman's golf clubs from his office to his car. No matter: I was an editor, a pundit. I was paid to educate readers about how Washington really works.

Now it's two a.m. and I'm the one being educated. It's February in Chicago, about ten degrees outside, and my pockets are filled with crumpled posters of The Opponent. At one point there were four people running against my brother for an open seat on the city council, but now, in a runoff, there is only one. I hate The Opponent. I hate the people who work for him and am convinced they are all child abusers. I hate the local reporters who seem unable to grasp that my brother is the greatest political prospect since Abe Lincoln grew whiskers.

I am, in a word, possessed. More people—reporters in particular—should learn what it's like inside a campaign. The fear and insecurity. The all or nothing gamble. The hope. The experience engages voters and provides reporters with the insight to be incisive and tough.

There is knowledge: how to build a precinct operation; what to say when knocking on doors; little things like picking campaign colors and big ones like deciding on campaign themes. There is also perspective: I've done a dozen stories about negative campaigning, for instance, but I never understood what it feels like to be low-balled. As a reporter, I was disengaged from such stories, finding them dull and unimportant. As a campaign manager, I responded venomously, until cooler heads prevailed.

We spent $280,000 on the election. The Opponent spent $250,000. This is a grotesque amount and it underscores how daunting it is to run for even the most rudimentary public office. Both candidates have quick smiles and, with a little well-placed gel, nice hairdos. This matters, but plain speaking, a solid message, and knocking on doors play an equally large role. Even in local Chicago, political character is an issue.

Begging for (and thankfully receiving) the forgiveness of a patrolman in the middle of the night is one way of glimpsing democracy in action, as are a number of other humbling experiences: going door to door during the dinner hour, for instance, or trying to chat up the candidate to a bunch of freezing commuters at a bus stop. As a way of understanding how our system works, there is no substitute.

Teacher candidate

Sure I am biased. But there is really no arguing with my brother's credentials. First, Edwin has never been indicted. For a candidate running for city council in Chicago, that in itself is a

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pretty good platform. The number of indicted council members frequently hovers around 10 percent. Second, he has no experience dipping into the public till. This too makes him stand out: after approving a $296 million municipal bond issue for infrastructure repairs recently, 15 aldermen designated part of the money to repave streets in front of their homes. By not having a rap sheet, Edwin was a potential juggernaut.

But there is more. Edwin, who was 28 when the campaign began, went to Harvard. He graduated at the beginning of the "go-go" eighties, but opted against pursuing greed and glory on Wall Street and took a teaching job in Chicago's public schools. For four years, he taught elementary school children in a predominantly Hispanic west side neighborhood. His community involvement was extensive and had been cited by the mayor.

Edwin didn't become a teacher in order to become a politician. He actually enjoyed sharing his knowledge with a group of unruly ten-year-olds. Edwin had been undeterred by the obstacles that keep so many talented people from becoming public school teachers. When he first applied to become a teacher, for instance, Edwin was told that his degree in psychology from Harvard did not qualify him to teach in the public schools. To become "qualified" he dutifully wasted a year of his life getting a master's degree in education at a local teacher's college.

He believes in public service. Still, life as an educator in a big-city public school bureaucracy is frustrating. No books. No chalk. Standardized lessons. Low pay. At the beginning of three of the four years he taught, Edwin and his colleagues went on strike. To do something about it, Edwin twice applied to become a member of the Chicago Board of Education. He was rejected both times. Denied access to those areas within the bureaucracy that would allow him more say in improving Chicago's schools, he began exploring the possibility of running for public office.

This was in the summer of 1986. It was seven months prior to the election, and, although the incumbent had not yet decided to step down, a changing of the guard seemed likely. The 43rd ward in Chicago is located along Lake Michigan just north of downtown. A primarily white community, it's known as home to the city's "Lakefront Liberals."

Over the years, the ward has become increasingly affluent. Gentrification has turned bungalows into showplace homes and urban renewal has transformed a number of factories into parks. Of Chicago's 50 wards, the 43rd is the second most affluent, with a median family income of more than $30,000.

Not surprisingly, the ward's politics have grown more conservative. The incumbent alderman, a liberal ideologue first elected in 1975, pondered these changes as well as the deep deficits he had racked up during two unsuccessful attempts at higher office and decided in August 1986 to retire to his law practice.

The H word

The following day my brother announced he was a candidate. A less momentous occasion can scarcely be imagined. To prepare for the big event, we combined the collective wisdom of a number of experienced political advisers with about $20,000 of consultant's advice and campaign materials to package Edwin's blue chip credentials. Slogan: "For the Basics, Back the Best." Poster: the candidate, jacket slung over his shoulder, smiling. Campaign literature: a heartfelt letter from Edwin decrying politics-as-usual. Image (wholly unintentional): Frankie Valli in his prime.

Intuitively we knew Edwin's strengths were his knowledge of the public schools and his study of the city budget. However, what came through was that too many members of his family were involved in the packaging process. We love him, it all shouted, you'll love him, too. (And right away some did: several high school girls stopped by the campaign office asking for copies to hang on their closet doors. A teen idol craze was averted only because beyond about three feet the posters, printed black on grey, were unreadable.) Blinded by our family affection, we failed to notice some of the rougher edges, like the wrinkles in Edwin's pants or the belt loop he missed. Voters beyond adolescence were less likely to be impressed.

The Opponent, motherless no doubt, projected an image as slick as oil. His slogan ("Effective. Experienced. Independent.") was supported in his campaign literature with lists of accomplishments. He looked God-like, born to lead. His message, printed in blue and orange against a white background, jumped off the page like it was in 3-D. Plastered side by side on El platforms throughout the ward, The Opponent's posters, fresh and colorful, made ours look like a run for the student council. Certainly our explanation for why Edwin should be alderman wasn't simply that he was a nice guy. But that was the message our initial efforts conveyed. I remembered Ted Kennedy's incoherence in 1980 when Roger Mudd

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asked why he should be president. Like most people, I laughed at the time. Never again. Those questions, which seem like softballs, are doubtless the hardest questions to answer.

Back at the drawing board we ditched the slogan, hid the posters, printed legible literature and decided to let Edwin be Edwin. Above all, he was a teacher. Lousy public schools mean a lousy workforce. Improve them and you've taken a big step toward ensuring future prosperity. Who better to do that than someone who understands the system?

Only one problem remained: in a ward populated by yuppies and DINKS (double income no kids), public school teachers are about as respected as a bear market. It's a perception that no amount of white papers on education reform can change. Fortunately, there is one word that can make a yuppie respect a public school teacher running against an attorney, one word that could have evened the playing field between my brother and The Opponent: Harvard. A Harvard-educated public school teacher is to so many people an oxymoron that it shatters their preconceptions. It had, we hoped, just the ring of intelligence and sacrifice to make even the most doubting DINK think. Budget reform and community matters were part of the package, but if voters knew just one thing about Edwin it was going to be that he had the longest job title in Chicago: a Harvardeducatedpublicschoolteacher.

Press kit blues

Like every campaign, we hoped to get our message out through the press. But reporters didn't exactly hang on our every pronouncement. When we held a press conference to unveil Edwin's position paper on the city budget, only one reporter showed up. Our disappointment was compounded when the reporter, who worked for a local wire service, evinced more interest in my knowledge of possible newspaper jobs in Washington than in Edwin's mastery of the city's finances.

When we released Edwin's school reform package, in many ways the intellectual centerpiece of the campaign, we had the same confidence-building turnout. Hoping some good visuals would draw TV coverage, we held the press conference in front of a local school. When no camera showed, Edwin held the press conference in the confines of the lone reporter's car to escape the sub-zero temperature.

We weren't naive enough to expect a large turnout. One important reason for putting together detailed position papers was to influence editorial board members of the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*. Their endorsements were important, and to get them Edwin needed to address significant city-wide issues. Still, before each press conference we prepared dozens of press kits, just in case a miraculously slow news day led all the political reporters in town to our office.

A press kit is a horrible, demoralizing thing. Nothing better exemplifies how desperate campaigns are for publicity. On the bottom of the press kit goes the position paper. It has about as much chance of being read as an article in *Playboy*. On top of that goes the summary of the position paper. This serves to thicken the packet so that even in tossing it out unopened a reporter will know he's dealing with a candidate of substance. Next up is the press release, which assumes either that no one will show or that the reporters who do make an appearance will be too bored to take notes. When, as expected, the press conference bombs, the press kits are schlepped over to all the newspapers and TV stations on the theory that if you're persistent enough, some editor might give you mention on page 65.

Eventually, of course, the campaign does get coverage. With 49 other alderman races to write about, as well as a bitter campaign for mayor, all the press has time for is the basic "who's who" piece. One by one the reporters come by the office, which we conveniently over-staff for the occasion, and get down to the business of parachute journalism. Invariably they neither know nor care about the issues. Their interest is strictly money (as in "Aren't you buying the election?") and the mayor's race ("Who do you support?"). When pressed about issues, most reporters, in a discouraging chorus, reply: "Do you have a press kit?"

There were several candidates running for mayor, but as far as the press was concerned it was Harold Washington vs. the "regulars." Considering Chicago's political heritage, it's no surprise that the term regular—as in regular Democrat—is synonymous with "hack." It's applied principally to members of Mayor Daley's machine and their political heirs. Politicians who broke ranks with Daley and those allied with him are "independents." It's a sign of Daley's lingering influence that more than ten years after his death local politicians are still judged in relation to the Boss.

The press likes it this way. It makes it easy to categorize candidates and handicap races. Either you're a hack or you're not. In a racially polarized city like Chicago there is an implicit message

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Behind the office we found garbage bags full of Edwin's posters. Three days later our phone lines were mysteriously snipped.

as well: if you're not with Mayor Washington, you're a racist. Although the mayor made no formal endorsement, everyone knew he supported The Opponent. That made Edwin the regular. It only made matters worse when Edwin suggested such preconceptions were dated. In the *Sun-Times*'s "who's who" piece, Edwin was reviled for insisting he was not a mouthpiece for the machine. To this "boast of independence," the *Sun-Times* replied that Edwin "fit snugly inside political webs."

Besides running a series of tabloid-style overview pieces (the recurring headline during the runoff: "The battle of the bluebloods"), the media focused primarily on making the candidates look as foolish as possible. Without any proof, the *Tribune* wondered aloud if The Opponent actually lived in the ward. Edwin, who had lived in the same neighborhood for 23 of his 28 years, was chastised by the paper for having the chutzpah to allege he was a lifelong ward resident. Items like these, which the gossip columnists love, appear in every campaign and rarely, if ever, affect the outcome. Still, they reflect the patronizing attitude of so many political reporters who believe that, on the evolutionary scale, candidates are to used car salesmen what baboons are to the rest of us. Their attitude seems to be: whatever you're selling, we're not buying.

A certain press skepticism is, of course, warranted. Campaigns are wars with each side looking for any advantage; to get it, both sides try to manipulate the press. One week before the runoff, for instance, I turned on the evening news and was shocked to hear that my favorite deli, an extremely popular spot in the middle of the ward, was going to be torn down in favor of a high rise. Shock turned to panic when The Opponent, his cursed face now getting precious air time, told the reporter he was fighting the fat-cat developers who supported Edwin and wanted to make money at the neighborhood's expense.

Not only were there no plans to tear down the deli, but both Edwin and The Opponent supported the pending city council ordinance that would prohibit the construction of a high rise on the property. The issue was phony, but coming up on election day the press, desperate for some hot political news, turned it into a cause celebre. Advantage: The Opponent.

While we were never able to land such a glorious sucker punch, we did manage a few slick jabs. When Edwin received the endorsement of a prominent public interest group, we made sure that in reporting the story the press mentioned that The Opponent was on the organization's board of directors. Our most shameful moment —one that more than any other, shows the strain campaigns place on people—occurred less than a week before the election when, after a long illness, my grandmother died. The day after she passed away, we called a local columnist who had known my grandmother. He ran the following item in the *Sun-Times*: "Popular Ada Rosenberg succumbed without realizing her ambition to campaign for her grandson, Edwin Eisendrath, 43rd ward alderman candidate." Advantage: Eisendrath.

At one level ward races are turf battles. The 43rd ward, with about 60,000 people, has an area of about four square miles. There are six major streets and only a handful of corners where they intersect. The number of busy El stations and bus stops is equally finite. A well-organized campaign should control these spots. For much of the time before the election, The Opponent, his 3-D posters at the ready, was firmly in command. He gazed from every lamp post, his blond hair and aquiline nose making him look all too much like Robert Redford.

Before working in a campaign, I never paid the slightest attention to political posters. Most people probably don't, and the impact they have in larger contests is almost certainly negligible. Posters don't mean much, for instance, in a contest with lots of TV ads. We had none, however, and so visibility on the streets became an important way of reinforcing our name recognition. The Opponent knew this all too well. The ward was smothered with his smiling mug. Looking at a lamppost was like gazing into an eclipse. I was so self-conscious about The Opponent's posters

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that after passing one, I felt like shouting: "He's been airbrushed! In person he looks more like Gumby."

Our counterattack consisted of ordering thousands of hooker-red posters so big that, once up, a passerby who couldn't immediately make out the name Eisendrath emblazoned in white might think he'd wandered into China on flag day. On a Friday night ten days before the February election we gathered together a group of high school buddies and, with visions of the Sharks battling the Jets, set out to reclaim the neighborhood. That Saturday was sunny and unseasonably warm. The streets were packed with people, and everywhere they looked and as far as the eye could see, there was the name Eisendrath.

For a day anyway. On Sunday a political gadfly working for The Opponent came by to inform us that we would get a good lesson in Chicago politics if we went out back and looked in the alley. Behind the office we found garbage bags full of Edwin's posters. Three days later our phone lines were mysteriously snipped. It wasn't too long before the cop with the knack for a good headline had me quivering in the back seat of his patrol car.

Campaigning in tongues

Since the days of the machine, elections in Chicago have been held at the end of February. The theory was that in the middle of winter the only people who will work the precincts are patronage employees whose jobs depend on how well they turn out the vote. With few exceptions, however, the days of the ward heelers are over. A first-time candidate has to build from scratch a precinct operation based solely on volunteers.

This is a daunting task for a political neophyte running in an upscale ward with constituents who, if the stereotypes are to be believed, think of volunteerism in terms of joining the local health club. What Edwin needed was credibility. On paper this is hard to come by as a 28-year-old elementary school teacher. Matters certainly weren't helped any when, reporting on the campaign's first fund-raiser, one local reporter noted that it was "organized by the candidate's mother."

We combatted the image of Edwin sitting in a high chair four ways. First, we ran him ragged. At bus stops every morning. In front of high rises every evening. Knocking on doors every night. Sure, some people treated him like a Hare Krishna, but most were open-minded and willing to hear him out. During the Super Bowl he pressed the flesh in the neighborhood bars; on Valentine's Day he played the piano in homes for the elderly. On many a Sunday my nice Jewish brother sang the Gospel and made his pitch in one of several all-black churches in the ward. After one church address a lady suddenly began speaking in tongues. Though most people weren't quite so moved upon first meeting him, many of our best precinct captains were total strangers who happened by Edwin one morning on their way to work.

Second, we sought numerous endorsements. Like most campaigns we started with a citizens' committee. This list, which at the outset is the only proof the candidate has that he's not going to get shut out, consists of every third cousin and high school acquaintance you can remember. Edwin and I have no other siblings, yet we managed to find 40 relatives for the citizens' committee.

Edwin and The Opponent each fielded an all-star roster of political endorsements. The first public official to back Edwin was the ward's Democratic committeeman. Edwin had for several years been a volunteer in her organization. A former alderman who had known Edwin for years also signed on. From there the committeeman and former alderman turned to other public officials they knew and convinced them of Edwin's merits. Pretty soon three state legislators and the attorney general were having their pictures taken with Edwin and saying in press kits and in letters to constituents that they hadn't seen a political prospect like him since, well, Abe Lincoln grew whiskers. Just prior to the February election the *Tribune*, citing the position papers that its reporters found so dull, also endorsed Edwin. (The *Sun-Times*, which in February endorsed one of the candidates who failed to make the runoff, backed Edwin in April.)

Third, we contacted voters through the mail and over the phone. In four months we mailed more than 200,000 letters and pieces of campaign literature to ward residents. If someone moved into the ward, he or she got a letter from Edwin. If someone registered to vote, a letter was sent. Three times we mailed letters or campaign newspapers to every household in the ward. Everyone over 65 was informed by the attorney general that in the city council Edwin would champion senior power; in case they forgot between the first election and the runoff the attorney general sent them a reminder letter. About half the ward residents live in high rises that don't allow volunteers to go door to door. Almost all of them received five phone calls and at least four letters.

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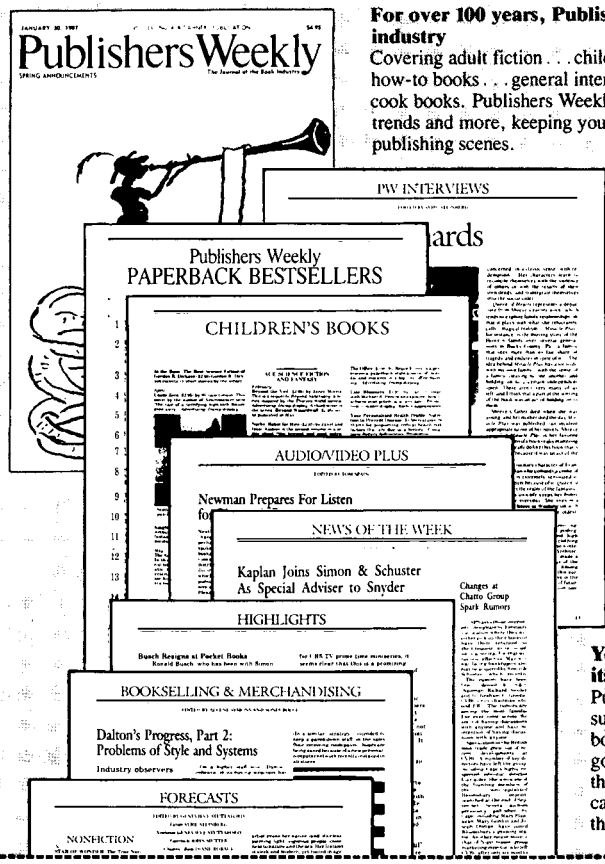

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A 65-year-old newly registered Democrat who had just moved into a lakefront high rise in the ward would have received 13 letters and five phone calls—probably enough to get a pretty good sense of where Edwin stood on the issues.

Even at the ward level this is extremely expensive, underscoring that with rare exception the key to becoming a credible candidate is money. You can get endorsed by the Pope and still lose the Catholic vote if you don't have the money to let people know it. Likewise, no candidate, no matter how tireless, can come into contact with even a small percentage of the voters. In this respect Edwin was lucky. He had a network of family and friends willing to make generous financial contributions. He also had enough standing in the community to generate a large number of modest contributions. Edwin's good fortune extended to his having a best friend who's a fundraising genius. The three candidates who failed to make the runoff were all badly outspent. Undoubtedly that helped cripple their campaigns. In the runoff, however, Edwin and The Opponent went at it practically dollar for dollar.

There is no such thing as raising too much money, because in a campaign there is no such thing as overkill. This is especially true in a campaign like ours where, because of the expense, no polls were taken. As far as we could tell, the bundles of letters we sent out each day were providing voters with free bathroom wallpaper. So tenuous was our sense of progress that we treasured every positive comment and any slipup haunted us for weeks. At a bus stop one morning, after about 30 minutes of tucking Edwin's campaign literature leper-like into the overcoat pockets of people too cold to reach out their hands, let alone talk, one woman approached me with a big smile and her arm out. She said she was thinking of voting for Edwin but wanted to know more. Seeing a bus approaching in the distance I launched into my two-minute offense.

Harvardeducatedpublicschoolteacher, I said. Plans to cut city spending. She teed the ball up for me and asked how. Knowingly I replied: pensions and health benefits of city workers need to be trimmed. Her eyes narrowed, and just before boarding her bus she told me what I already knew: she worked for the city. As sure as I was standing there I knew the election had just been lost.

The only tangible evidence that we were moving forward was the growth of the volunteer operation—the fourth leg of our campaign strategy. Faced with the two coldest months of the year, people were actually coming forward and volunteering to knock on doors: accountants, people who were unemployed, lawyers, doctors, policemen, bankers. Out of nowhere came a real estate broker who, in addition to becoming a terrific precinct captain, managed to get the waitresses at a popular neighborhood restaurant to wear sweatshirts with Edwin's name on them. Another precinct captain who would have done the Boss proud was a bus driver who, whenever his bus took him through the ward, laid out Edwin's campaign literature on all the seats.

The DINKS deliver

We had little to offer these people except ideas. No money, no jobs, and certainly no glamour. And neither during nor after the campaign did any of our workers come asking favors. Yet most of those who got involved (measured either in time or money) were the young urban professionals so often bashed by pundits for having no vision beyond the edge of the nearest bond pit. Of the more than 400 people who helped out, only a handful had ever been involved in a campaign before. Together we learned the tricks of the campaign trade: how to canvas neighborhoods to find out where people stand; how to "run voters" on election day to make sure the people who said they would vote for Edwin actually went to the polls. For a group that will be remembered for making the eighties a decade of avarice, it was a moving display of selflessness. The new generation of precinct captains may never be as dogged as their machine predecessors, but in the clutch they were no less enthusiastic. There are 72 precincts in the 43rd ward. On election day, each captain had to be at his or her precinct by 5:30 a.m. When I called at 5 a.m. to make sure everyone was getting ready, not a single one was still in bed.

Edwin beat The Opponent. They raised and spent about the same money, matched endorsements coattail for coattail, and got an equal amount of publicity. The Opponent is four years older and his resume—which includes a stint as counsel to the local Better Government Association and as a legislative aide to former Rep. Abner Mikva—would do George Bush proud. Yet Edwin got 65 percent of the vote.

Why the rout? One reason was The Opponent's association with Harold Washington. Washington's lack of popularity in the 43rd ward and The Opponent's association with him hurt. The Opponent also suffered from the where's-the-beef phenomenon. His resume was so gold-plated that he decided to run on it. Edwin, by contrast, ran

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on an agenda: school reform and city finances. Voters received equal amounts of literature from the candidates, but the messages couldn't have been more different. The Opponent talked about what he had done; Edwin talked about what he was going to do.

Another reason was that, despite my urgings to the contrary, cooler heads did prevail. In debates and in the literature we distributed, Edwin was monotonously positive. In community forums he talked about what he planned to accomplish. The Opponent, by contrast, was negative. For months, he thumbed Edwin more times than a lousy club fighter. Six days before the runoff election The Opponent mailed out an "Urgentgram" to most ward residents. In it he accused Edwin of "desperation tactics...a vicious whisper and smear campaign..'Hit' pieces in local media." Mistaking an overzealous reporter for one of our campaign workers, the Urgentgram declared: "Days ago, two people were caught ransacking garbage at my house, taking pictures through my mail slot." Yet on election day, Edwin won 71 of the ward's 72 precincts.

Running a clean campaign helped Edwin gain voters' trust. The Opponent, bless his slickness, was too smooth. In the 43rd ward lawyers outnumber public school teachers probably 100 to 1. Many parents send their children to private schools. Yet a public school teacher whomped three attorneys. In the end, the yuppies and the DINKS did think, and in doing so they came to appreciate the value of sacrifice and working for the common good. No one traded in his BMW, but many came out and volunteered, and almost all ended up with a far less cynical view of the political process.

I know I did. □

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Steven Brill
The American Lawyer

The plea bargain afforded Ivan Boesky in 1986 was not a "fantastic settlement" as it was called by the SEC. While Boesky could have been tried for seven felony counts, under the deal, he pleaded guilty to only one—three fewer than Dennis Levine. While the press widely reported Boesky as having paid a $100 million fine, Brill shows that the arbitrageur actually paid a fine closer to $30.9 million in stock that lost its value because of the delays in turning it over to federal authorities. All totaled, Boesky is estimated to have earned $203 million from inside tips, leaving his net worth after the plea bargain at $300 million, much of it in the name of his wife and children and thus invulnerable to the civil suits pending against him.

Mike Royko
Chicago Tribune

The "minimum-security prison" to which Ivan Boesky has been sentenced means no walls, picnic grounds for visitors, two tennis courts, volleyball and basketball courts, a softball diamond, and a physical fitness center with five weight-lifting machines. Fortunately, if the arbitrageur wants to take a breather, there are snack machines and five TV rooms "where they have all the cable stations, including the Financial News Network."

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation.

The award for stories published or aired in January will be announced in the April issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in February will close March 15. The winner will be announced in the May issue. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

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TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES

IN THE TRADITION OF KING, GANDHI, AND NIELSEN

Sojourners magazine is selling a videocasette teaching nonviolent resistance.

SEVERAL WERE CLOCKED AT MACH 2

Swarms of butterflies have eaten 50,000 acres of coca plants in Peru.

FIRST CHAMBERMAID

Robert Dole has said of his wife, Elizabeth: "If I get elected President, I get to make the big decisions and she gets to make the bed."

NOT ONLY THAT, SHE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A LICENSED NUTRITIONIST ON HER STAFF

The town of Pacific Grove, California closed a nine-year-old girl's lemonade stand because she didn't have a proper permit.

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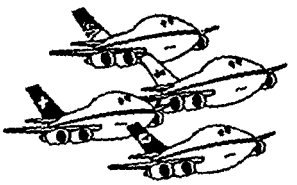

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PRIOR TO THAT SHE HAD BEEN SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE AT FREDERICK'S OF HOLLYWOOD

At the University of Southern California, Barrie Thorne has been named the first Barbara Streisand Professor of Intimacy and Sexuality.

"WHEN YOU RETURN TO SAN SALVADOR, YOU'LL BE ELIGIBLE TO REAPPLY"

The San Jose office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service has lost the amnesty applications of nine illegal aliens, including that of the first person to file for amnesty at the office.

TAX REFORM

The Internal Revenue Service allows nonprofit organizations to adopt profit-sharing plans.

"I'D LIKE TO ANNOUNCE THE APPOINTMENT OF MR. CARRICK AS CHIEF NEGOTIATOR FOR THE ARMS TALKS IN GENEVA."

William Carrick, manager of the Gephardt campaign, discussed Albert Gore and the Super Tuesday primaries with *The Washington Post*. "I can't wait. It's blood lust. Let me at him. I hate him. I hate all of them. I think they are the phoniest two-bit bastards that ever came down the pike, starting with Al Gore, moving through boy wonder ex-wordsmith, the mosquito who roared [Fred Martin, Gore's manager]. They are just a [expletive] bunch of meddlesome bastards."

THEY STOLE THE SHOW

In Minnesota, both the winner of the state's Miss Minnesota contest and the runner-up have been convicted on charges of shoplifting.

"MAY I SAY, I THINK YOUR QUALIFICATIONS ARE EXCELLENT"

George Mair, the press aide to Speaker Jim Wright who recently attracted attention by writing indignant letters to news organizations complaining about their treatment of Wright, is the author of a new book, *The Sex Book Digest: A Peek Between the Covers of 113 of the Most Erotic, Exotic, and Edifying Sex Books*.

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From lifting up the poor to shaking down the elderly.

The Best and Worst of Public Interest Groups

by Rita McWilliams

Twenty-five years ago a young Lebanese-American set up shop in Washington, D.C. Like those of most young entrepreneurs, his was a shoe-string operation. He became famous when the press discovered that his adversary, one of the nation's largest and wealthiest corporations, had sent a private eye out searching for ways to discredit him.

A quarter century has passed since Ralph Nader began his successful crusade against General Motors's deathtrap, the Corvair. Before Nader was finished, he had revolutionized the auto industry, instituting the use of shatter-resistant glass, shock-absorbing bumpers, collapsing steering wheels, and seat belts.

But more importantly, he had changed the way Washington works.

His example activated citizens across the nation to fight the corporate world, the oppressive politician, the high-paid influence peddler. Today more than 2,000 groups champion a variety of causes "in the public interest." Public interest victories have put nonsmoking seats on commerical airplanes and nutrition labels on soup cans and cereal boxes. They have put smoke detectors in apartment buildings, flame-resistant clothing on children, and cleaner air in the cities and countryside.

After 25 years, this industry retains a powerful, if little-examined, position in the policy-making process. The influence of the public interest industry, and the inevitable conflicts about what constitutes "the public interest," invites a scrutiny of its work. What are the best public interest groups? What are the worst?

The manner in which public interest groups go about their work is particularly important, since they usually fight opponents with more money and manpower. Public interest groups have to rely on powers of moral persuasion. They have to be savvy about creating new consituencies for their cause and mobilizing public opinion.

At their best, public interest groups are fair and ethical; their strategies are smart, and their goals are worthy. They are intellectually honest. They use statistics to their advantage, but without lying. Their work challenges the public to think, and sometimes challenges even the groups that fund them.

The worst public interest groups alienate the public rather than rally it to their cause. They use deceptive tactics that exploit the public's fears or hide their true intent. They enrich themselves at their members' expense. With moral credibility the industry's most precious capital, the work of the worst public interest groups threatens all those who share the public interest label.

It was not possible to examine the work of each of the 2,000 public interest groups in Washington. The following list was drawn from interviews with reporters, lobbyists, congressional aides, political scientists, and public interest leaders. It shows the kind of work to which public interest groups should aspire, and the kind which it should seek to avoid. The successes of the best and the disappointments of the worst offer important lessons for those committed to the public's true interests.

The Best

►**Citizens for Tax Justice**: Groups that take on rich and powerful adversaries have to find ways to promote their cause and create new constituencies. Citizens for Tax Justice did just that. The group's determined research found that some of the nation's largest corporations paid no taxes. CTJ's savvy and fearless promotion of its findings, even when doing so made its own board

Rita McWilliams is a Washington writer.

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members uncomfortable, helped create outrage that cut across ideological lines. This work helped set the stage for one of the most dramatic defeats that special interest groups have ever suffered: the 1986 overhaul of the federal tax code.

As a result, most Americans will pay significantly lower taxes this year—an average of $531 less for families earning between $20,000 and $50,000—and six million of the nation's poorest families have been removed from the tax rolls altogether.

CTJ was founded in 1979 in reaction to California's Proposition 13, which cut the state's property taxes and, with them, government services. With backing from labor unions, CTJ's original aim was to stop similar movements that would lay off government employees and cut services elsewhere.

The group's role in tax reform began in 1984 with Robert McIntyre, a Nader-trained lawyer who projects the image of a hard-nosed investigative reporter. Smart and serious, McIntyre seems more comfortable prowling document rooms than buttonholing legislators in hallways. He spent the summer of 1984 extracting tax data from the annual reports of the nation's largest businesses. McIntyre found that 128 large corporations had avoided paying federal income taxes in at least one of the three previous years, despite billions in profits. Then he named names. When CTJ issued a report called "The Top Ten Corporate Freeloaders," the media couldn't resist. Newspapers across the country highlighted stories about freeloaders like General Electric and Anheuser-Busch. Editors at *The New York Times* liked the part about defense contractors so much they ran it twice, by two different reporters.

"To actually attach names to those who avoided taxes was powerful," says Alan Murray, chief economics correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* and author of a book on the 1986 Tax Reform Act. Unlike corporate tax lobbyists, McIntyre "had no budget to wine and dine anyone," Murray said. "He just kept churning out press releases and lists. He's shown what you can do with a good head, public information, and a personal computer."

As the demand for tax reform increased, congressional deliberations placed McIntyre in a tricky position with his own board. Some proposals, such as taxing fringe benefits that unions had won for their members, could have blown union support for tax reform. "He was fearless in defending what he thought was right, even if it bumped against his own bankroll," said McIntyre's friend Michael Kinsley, editor of *The New Republic*. McIntyre said he kept the union's support by stressing the larger tax picture. "We pointed out that most people would be better off overall and asked them to do their own analyses," McIntyre said. "They concluded the overall picture would be better for their members."

The unions that funded McIntyre helped publicize the cause. The Communication Workers of America held a press conference in New Jersey in which a union representative held up a General Electric light bulb and announced, "I paid more sales tax on this light bulb than General Electric paid in taxes during the last three years." The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees began a penny brigade, sending lawmakers a single cent toward the deficit and saying that while it wasn't much, it was more than 128 big businesses had paid. Union T-shirts read: "I paid more taxes than Lockheed, Dow Chemical, and W.R. Grace and Co. combined."

While CTJ's funding comes primarily from liberal groups, their figures helped garner conservative support. Columnist James J. Kilpatrick used the group's figures. So did corporations who were stuck paying high taxes. Companies paying high taxes, such as Whirlpool and Ralston-Purina, began complaining about the competition's freeloading. The targets of attack squawked at McIntyre's accounting, arguing he misrepresented items like deferred tax liabilities and ignored investment incentives that help the economy. But their criticisms were lost in the swelling support for tax reform.

CTJ is now scrutinizing the corporate loopholes in state tax codes. Next on the group's list are billionaires who use real estate deals to duck taxes. Donald Trump and Mort Zuckerman beware.

►**Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**: "Poor Still Getting Poorer, Budget Study Concludes," ran the recent headline in *The Washington Post*, after another study from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Washington is loaded with high-priced lobbyists seeking subsidies for the middle class and for business. The CBPP raises an effective voice for the poor. It does so by writing quick and clear analyses of how legislation would affect the poor. The numbers, which are trusted across the ideological spectrum, often speak for themselves.

Director Robert Greenstein founded the Center in 1981, after heading the Agriculture Department's Food and Nutrition Service, the agency responsible for the nation's food assistance programs. He and seven crack analysts work in stark

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Editors at *The New York Times* liked the information about defense contractors so much they ran it twice, by two different reporters

offices, sifting through the latest numbers from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and the Census Bureau. Their phone number is the first one most reporters dial for statistics on the poor. "I find that they don't overdo their spin on things," said Tom Kenworthy of *The Washington Post.* "They don't put a big ideological rap on you when they explain their analyses."

The speed and accuracy of the Center's work has earned it an ear on the Hill, too. An example from the 1986 tax reform debate is typical. When it looked as if the Senate Finance Committee was ready to endorse a less generous tax credit for the working poor than that favored by the House, Greenstein jumped in. In one day his staff produced a three-page memo proving that the poor would be hurt and showing the senators a simple way to solve the problem. The committee members didn't even realize what they had done. When they found out, they took Greenstein's advice.

The Center again guarded the interests of the poor during the drafting of recent deficit reduction laws. Its analysis contributed to Congress's decision to exempt certain food, welfare, and medical programs from automatic cuts that will take place if Congress fails to meet the law's deficit reduction targets.

To its credit, the Center also searches the budget for items to cut. Even programs much loved by urban liberals, who provide the bulk of the funding for Greenstein's group, sometimes make the list. These include suggested reductions for the Economic Development Administration and Urban Development Action Grants. Recently the Reagan administration adopted a suggestion from the Center to provide incentives for states to begin competitive bidding in supplemental food programs, so more women and children can receive milk, cheese, eggs, fruit juices, and other foods. The Center has also helped states implement workfare programs to help welfare recipients find jobs.

►**The Natural Resources Defense Council**: These are the Wall Street lawyers of the environmental movement. When an environmental cause needs first-class legal representation or policy analysis, it turns to the NRDC. The group's scientific and legal expertise has put it at the center of every major environmental debate for two decades. "They are smart, aggressive, and they know what they are doing," said Ron Outen, a former Republican staffer for the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee.

The NRDC pioneered the use of the lawsuit to safeguard the environment. Since it began work in 1970, the NRDC's suits have led to landmark decisions influencing the laws governing air and water pollution, toxic wastes, drinking water, pesticides, nuclear energy, energy conservation, and land use. The *Calvert Cliffs* case, for example, forced government regulators to take into account environmental concerns when issuing licenses for the construction of nuclear power plants.

The NRDC often slows the pace of potentially hazardous development by filing suit to block action long enough for Congress to get involved. It delayed the construction of the Clinch River Breeder Reactor long enough for Congress to kill the project. On a different front, the NRDC's lawsuit against the timber industry in West Virginia led to the National Forest Management Act, which significantly restricts clear-cutting on national forest lands.

The NRDC also rides herd on the Environmental Protection Agency, checking its enforcement of clean air and water laws. In 1976, the NRDC took the lead role in compelling the EPA to enforce the Clean Water Act and control industrial pollutants. EPA staff members say NRDC lawyers know more about the Clean Air Act than anyone else, including most EPA lawyers. Early on, the NRDC won a major victory when it forced the Tennessee Valley Authority to reduce its sulfur dioxide emissions. This set a pattern for

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future enforcement actions. The Council's victories also include the reduction of lead in gasoline and the control of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer.

The NRDC's quality work allows it to draw support from across the political spectrum. Today it has a budget of $10 million, drawn from individual and foundation contributions, and employs 25 attorneys.

►**The Nature Conservancy**: Other environmental groups condemn The Nature Conservancy for refusing to take on the corporate world or the Reagan administration. But by forgoing these tactics the low-profile Conservancy has preserved some 2.6 million acres of selected wetlands, deserts, forests, prairies, and islands. Their work helps establish an important public interest principle: you don't always have to work through the government to get things done.

While many other environmental groups are busy talking from their K Street offices, The Nature Conservancy is out with mud on its boots, snatching vital lands from the jaws of condominium developers. "They are all action and no talk," said Frank Dunkle, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

When Conservancy operatives hear of a plan to build a ski resort on a mountain that provides the last good habitat for a certain warbler, they don't issue antidevelopment manifestos. Instead, Conservancy agents begin conventional commerical negotiations to buy the land outright before the developer. With donations of cash and land topping $73 million last year, the group commands considerable financial clout.

The Conservancy's non-confrontational approach keeps the group in good stead with corporate directors, from whom the Conservancy courts donations. As a result, The Nature Conservancy has amassed the largest system of privately owned nature sanctuaries in the world. It protects more than 150 species of endangered plants and animals and preserves some examples of America's most jeopardized natural ecosystems.

The Nature Conservancy also performs a unique service for the government. When a government agency decides to buy property, but hasn't received the spending authority it needs, the Conservancy often steps in, buying the property and holding it until the government gets the money. And it can serve as a middleman between government and private donors. It played a crucial role in the Prudential Insurance Company's recent donation of 120,000 acres of North Carolina forest and wetlands to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For ten years, the Conservancy had appealed to Prudential to preserve or donate the land, which was considered the Southeast's most significant unprotected area. Nature Conservancy accountants and lawyers helped Prudential outline the tax advantages that encouraged the donation. Valued at $50 million, it is among the largest gifts in the history of American conservation.

►**National Taxpayers Union**: Public interest groups spend much of their time demanding that the government do something. Protect consumers! Regulate business! Save the environment! National Taxpayers Union tries to get the government to stop doing something—stop wasting money on boondoggles.

NTU is discerning in identifying wasteful projects. And it shoots at both liberal and conservative targets. While its own actions may be motivated by the conservatives' desire for a smaller federal government, its activities are useful to the whole public interest industry: the fewer things the government does wrong, the more faith the public will have in its ability to do the things we want it to do right.

The group was founded in 1969 by James D. Davidson, a 22-year-old graduate student who had worked for the Nixon campaign. He was disillusioned that so many campaign workers hadn't thought past the next election. "No one was thinking about the future fiscal well-being of the nation," he said. "These things scared me. I had this great illusion that we could do something for the poor neglected taxpayer, that if we spoke out it would be like sprinkling pixie dust in a fairy tale and everything would be all right."

NTU scored its first victory when it helped scuttle the Nixon administration's proposal to build a supersonic transport like the Concorde. It helped eliminate the Synthetic Fuels Corporation, which was trying to produce synthetic fuel at $60 a barrel when oil was selling for less than half that price. NTU also joined in a coalition to defeat the $6 billion Westway highway project slated for Manhattan's West Side. It would have been America's most expensive highway, at $15,000 an inch. Joining with environmental groups, NTU helped kill the Clinch River Breeder Reactor, where cost overruns were more than enough to wipe out the savings it was designed to produce.

NTU has a penchant for making enemies. Each year, it reports the biggest pork barrel artists in

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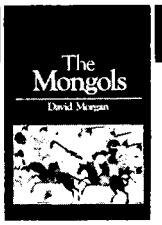

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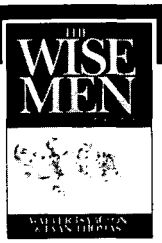

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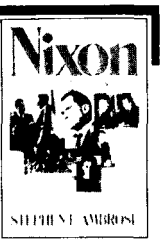

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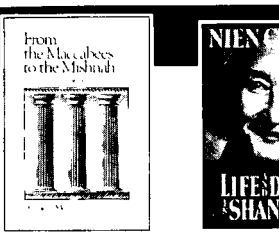

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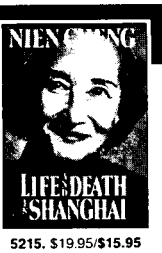

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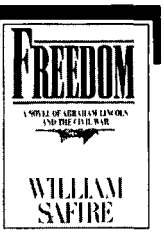

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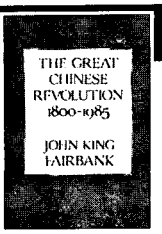

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Congress, an activity that especially irritates conservatives because it doesn't differentiate between defense spending and domestic spending. Bureaucrats despise it for carping about the annual civil service pay raises and pension increases. NTU opposes the "double-dipping" that allows government workers to collect a pension while drawing another government salary. NTU has also been a force in stemming pay raises for congressmen and succeeded in its drive to get lawmakers to pay Social Security taxes like everyone else.

Unlike some other conservative groups, NTU doesn't spare the wastefulness of the Pentagon. When the wings of the military's C-5A cargo planes began to crack, NTU jumped on the Defense Department for accepting Lockheed's expensive repair contract without considering other feasible options. It has called for spending less on the defense of European and Asian allies. And NTU has also called for cuts in the generous military pensions that encourage valuable commissioned and noncommissioned officers to retire in their early forties and work for someone else.

Lots of congressional aides consider NTU "kooky." Maybe that's one reason why the national debt is so high.

The Worst

►**National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare**: "URGENT! Important Social Security and Medicare Information Enclosed," screams the official-looking envelope. "Attention Postmaster: Time Dated Official National Committee Documents Enclosed. Expedite for Immediate Delivery."

No one knows how many elderly citizens receiving this fundraising appeal confuse it with a real letter about their Social Security or Medicare benefits. But the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare knows one thing: this kind of letter raises big money, some $90 million so far.

The letters always ask recipients to "save the Social Security system" by sending money to the National Committee. Sometimes the Committee does such a good job of imitating the government's letters that the elderly show up at local Social Security offices to pay what the letter seems to demand in order to keep benefits coming.

The National Committee is headed by James Roosevelt, the eldest son of FDR. He regularly invokes his lineage in the National Committee's letters. "Never in the 51 years since my father, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, started the Social Security system. . ." is his typical opening pitch. Invariably, what follows is a breathless description of some dastardly plot he has uncovered to do away with the Social Security and Medicare programs. "Act now," he says. Sign the enclosed petition and send $10 to become a member. "I will be very disappointed if you don't join," he adds in a P.S.

These misleading fundraising techniques have drawn fire from many members of Congress. Lawton Chiles, chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, has co-sponsored legislation with Republican Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania that would force the National Committee to state in large print that its mail is not from the U.S. government. They drafted the bill after the National Committee sent an especially misleading letter implying that the Social Security fund would go broke unless contributions were made immediately.

Chiles, a Florida Democrat, found that those who could afford it least had given hundreds of dollars to the National Committee and that the group did little in Washington. A House investigation of the group concluded most of the funds went to a California direct mail firm, Butcher-Forde.

To counter the criticism that the Committee was invisible in Washington, it hired 13 lobbyists last year and moved into plush penthouse quarters on K Street's lawyers' lane. Then it began lobbying Congress with the same scare tactics it had used to shake down the unsuspecting elderly. Lobbyists delivered the names of nearly eight million Social Security recipients who, the Committee claimed, had signed petitions opposing Social Security cuts. The Committee did not say these "petitions" were part of fundraising gimmicks the Committee had been using for years.

Franklin Roosevelt's most important advice to the American people was to tell them they had nothing to fear but fear itself. He knew that a frightened citizenry was not a wise citizenry. His son James has exploited the corollary: a frightened citizenry is easily bilked.

►**The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws**: NORML is an example of a public interest group willing to embrace whatever cause is necessary to survive. It was founded in 1970 with the noble intention of keeping college kids and Vietnam veterans out of prison for smoking pot. But when society began winking at private and casual marijuana use (except for

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FDR knew that a frightened citizenry was not a wise citizenry. His son James has exploited the corollary: a frightened citizenry is easily bilked.

Supreme Court nominees), NORML had to search elsewhere for funds and *raison d'etre*. It found both in the lawyers for cocaine dealers and mid-level mobsters whom it now serves.

NORML raises a third of its funds by organizing legal seminars for those who defend cocaine smugglers and dealers of other hard drugs. (See Amy Cunningham, "NORML's Bad Trip," July-August 1986.) Want to know how to make federal drug agents look stupid on the stand? How to spot sympathetic jurors? How to cast doubt on federal informers? Then NORML's for you. It's also for people like Albert Krieger, the defense attorney for reputed mobster Joe Bonnano, who has helped lead the seminars. So has Carlos Madrid Palacios, the alleged security man for Jorge Ochoa, once estimated as the world's fourth-largest cocaine dealer.

"We're not at all ashamed to get their money and be associated with them," said Jon Gettman, NORML's director. "It doesn't matter what kind of criminals they have represented. Who is to say we should not defend criminals?"

Gettman makes it sound like NORML's activities stem from principle. In fact, it's *principal* they stem from, or the lack of it. NORML's membership and budget grew rapidly in the 1970s, fueled by the organization's highly publicized defenses of people like 19-year-old Jerry Mitchell of Missouri. In 1976, Mitchell was sentenced to 12 years in prison for selling an agent a third of an ounce of marijuana for five dollars and assisting in the sale of a pound. NORML helped get the sentence reduced, and contributions steadily rose. Its income grew from $87,000 in 1972 to $450,000 in 1978. But its outgo grew even faster, and the group was always in debt and hungry for more cash.

By 1978, much of NORML's original agenda had been achieved. Few casual pot smokers were getting arrested. Eleven states had decriminalized the use of marijuana and 30 others offered slap-on-the-wrist penalties. As the laws changed, the contributions slowed. By the end of the decade, NORML's original constituency of grow-your-own hippies was disappearing, and a new one of lawyers in $500 shoes was growing. NORML's officials say the lucrative legal seminars—$475 a person—are the single most important reason for a debt that has shrunk from $125,000 to $20,000 and a budget that's growing again.

NORML still does some good things. It publishes material on the health effects of marijuana. It lobbies the Drug Enforcement Administration to file environmental impact statements when spraying paraquat. It has argued against mandatory urine testing for Justice Department employees and fought constitutionally dubious efforts to make some drug lawyers testify against their clients. But NORML's ties to big-time drug dealers deny it the credibility it needs. So does its opposition to sensible proposals like that of William von Raab, the U.S. Customs Commissioner, to stamp the passports of convicted drug dealers.

A truer measure of NORML's effect on public policy was seen in 1977, when Dr. Peter Bourne attended the group's Christmas Party. Bourne, Jimmy Carter's drug policy adviser, took the opportunity to snort a bit of cocaine. When the story hit the press, Bourne resigned.

►**National Organization for Women**: There are hundreds of public interest groups that fight for equal opportunity. Together, they've made America a fairer and more decent place. But like all Washington lobbies they can wind up following their own agenda, instead of that of those they represent. Perhaps the worst offender in that category is the National Organization for Women. While it's the group that boasts the largest constituency—more than half of America—it also happens to be among the most out of touch.

There is much to be said on NOW's behalf. For

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most of its 21 years NOW has been the women's movement. Thanks in part to NOW, the workplace is less sexist and credit is available without discrimination. Even the Little League now lets girls step up to the plate. But when push comes to lobbying, NOW avoids the trenchwork it takes to get women the economic opportunites they deserve.

Instead, it opts for P.R. events and loud but empty rhetoric. "It is time to raise hell against an opposition that is frequently nothing but fascists!" harangued Eleanor Smeal at NOW's 1986 annual meeting. NOW's bylaws say its purpose "is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society." And on what fronts does NOW wage this war? There was the Central American front, when NOW organized the "Benjamin Linder Peace Tour," to protest American support of the Contras. There was the Iranian front, with NOW's call for the impeachment of Ronald Reagan over the Iran-Contra affair. And there was the Vatican front too, with NOW's "Last Lunch" to protest the policies of the Catholic Church.

O.K., you're thinking, so NOW engages in some ostentatious protests—it still does great work on behalf of women. That's not what lobbyists for other women's groups say. Look at what has happened since Senator Christopher Dodd introduced a bill that would commit $2.5 billion to improving day care, mostly for lower-income and working-class families who can't afford the $3,000 that a year of day care costs on average in the U.S. What is NOW doing to make sure it doesn't fall under the Gramm-Rudman cleaver? By its own admission, not much. It's simply "not enough to get excited about," said Sheri O'Dell, a NOW vice-president.

This kind of weak endorsement irks lobbyists for other women's groups who charge that NOW isn't pulling its weight. "Let's face it," said one women's rights lobbyist, "Ronald Reagan is in the White House and you have to get a bill through Congress. NOW would rather have principle and a fund-raising drive than win." According to the vast majority of lobbyists and Capitol Hill aides I spoke with, NOW has yet to be much of an asset to those lobbying for the Dodd measure. (By contrast, the Women's Equity Action League was singled out for its hard work on economic issues.)

So lax is NOW that it has ceded a great working women's issue to, of all people, Phyllis Schlafly: lifting the federal and local laws and regulations that restrict work that can be done at home. While Schlafly has spoken out publicly against these laws, NOW has been silent. That's tragic because these laws prevent more flexible work arrangements that could allow many women to spend more time with their families and still earn a living wage. The restrictions mostly date from a time when there were oppressive work conditions at home, with little regard for safety. But today those restrictions could be lifted with ease and safety could be ensured through a system of home inspection. It's an important family issue that NOW is too preoccupied to recognize.

NOW's national leadership wouldn't have to look far to find more constructive examples of women's advocacy. By contrast, many chapters of NOW across the country have scored important legislative victories, such as stricter spouse abuse laws in Wyoming and a rape prevention program in West Virginia. NOW's Chicago branch even sent members to Washington to lobby for more generous parental-leave laws. But NOW's national leaders are too busy fighting the fascists. No wonder it's lost a third of its members in the past ten years.

►Citizens for Sensible Control of Acid Rain (CSCAR): Who wouldn't be for the sensible control of acid rain? The utilities, coal producers, and manufacturing companies who fund this falsely advertised group, that's who.

Washington is full of misnamed corporate groups that pose as defenders of the public interest. The Clean Capital City Committee that led the opposition to a D.C. can and bottle refund law was funded by the Glass Packaging Institute, the Can Manufacturers Institute, and other businesses. These groups are a bad lot, but CSCAR is one of the worst.

A recent CSCAR "grassroots" campaign consisted of hiring Washington lobbyists to send out 800,000 letters denouncing a bill to control acid rain. Each packet contained a stamped envelope, addressed to the recipient's congressman, and a just-sign-and-send letter of opposition. The bill that was the target of attack would have forced power plants and large industries to phase down their sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide emissions.

"What we do is try to promote participation and understanding of the issue," said CSCAR's executive director, Thomas Buckmaster, who runs the operation from the Washington office of Fleishman & Hillard Inc., a public relations firm. Scientists do disagree about the effects of acid rain, and industries do have a right to tell their customers a side of the story that environmentalists skip, like the cost to consumers of emissions control. But those 800,000 "education"

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packets never said who was behind the project. The 130,000 people who Buckmaster proudly notes "took the extraordinary step" of signing the letter did so in the dark.

CSCAR only fessed up its industry backing to the letter recipients after the Public Interest Research Group and others who support acid rain legislation cried foul. Last year CSCAR finally began to include a line at the bottom of the stationery that disclosed that its financing came from utilities such as the American Electric and Power Corporation in Columbus, Ohio, and the Union Electric Company in St. Louis. "If industries want to lobby, that's fine," says Rep. James Florio, chairman of a House consumer affairs subcommittee. "But when they disguise themselves as grassroots citizens groups, that's deceptive. Their letter-writing campaign was phony, which doesn't say much for the group's confidence about winning if they played fairly." □

The ACLU and the right to die in a train wreck.

. . . One That Should Be The Best, But Isn't

by Paul Glastris

Does the Average Guy worry when he steps through an airport metal detector? Sure he does. He worries about business. He worries about the rising cost of season tickets. He worries about making his flight. He worries about his Walkman as it passes through the x-ray machine. And when the overhead buzzer goes off because he forgot to divest himself of his keys, and the young female attendent asks if he would please empty his pockets and pass through again, he worries if she thinks he's good looking.

What he probably does *not* worry about is whether the metal detector search violates his civil liberties. And that is what petrifies the American Civil Liberties Union. The group states its fear in ACLU policy #270: "Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of the airport search question is the readiness with which most people, civil libertarians included, have accepted and indeed welcomed such procedures. It reflects a disturbing tendency to accept any measures, such as routine searches in public places, which are supposedly devised to protect our safety. Such an atmosphere of acquiescence poses the gravest threat to all our civil liberties."

Supposedly devised? The gravest threat to all our civil liberties? The passion that the ACLU has historically marshalled to combat censorship and racial bigotry is now leading it to fight even the most benign safety measures. As we grope for what to do about hazards such as drunk driving and kids routinely toting pistols down school corridors, and as we seek to stem drug and alcohol abuse by the people who operate our trains and aircraft, the ACLU puts up its dukes as if it were mixing it up with Bull Connor.

When talking about public safety, ACLU officials can sound like nothing so much as Chicago

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School economists drearily insisting that padded dashboards and pollution controls might save lives but can't be tolerated because they threaten free enterprise. Similarly, the ACLU can't see metal detectors as the modest act of a democratic government to thwart hijackings and murders. It insists on seeing each measure "supposedly" meant to protect health and safety as another dangerous step towards fascism.

What is dangerous is the ACLU's reading of the Constitution, specifically its interpretation of the Fourth Amendment's prohibition of "unreasonable" searches and seizures. The ACLU has dismissed random searches, like those at the airport, as unconstitutional. But not all random searches are created equal. Surely, we have the common sense to recognize the difference between random searches with the rational aim of protecting public safety and searches with the irrational aim of persecuting minorities or minority opinion. There is also an important distinction between searches that employ outrageous techniques, like strip searches, and those that are "minimally intrusive," such as passing through a metal detector. And, finally, there's an important common sense distinction between searches so humiliating or terrifying that the innocent dread them and those that only the guilty fear. There are some fronts on which the ACLU wages noble constitutional struggles. The gate to the Eastern shuttle is not one of them.

This extremist reading of the Bill of Rights might be easy to dismiss if it were that of some small libertarian lobby with a walk-up office. But with 250,000 members, a budget of more than $15 million, and an important presence in Washington, the ACLU is one of the nation's most powerful lobbies. A crack staff of 70 attorneys, pro bono arrangements with the nation's top firms, a caseload that lets it brag of being "the largest private law firm in the country"—all this makes the ACLU a potent litigator. Only the Justice Department argues more cases before the Supreme Court.

But the Union's strength lies in more than numbers. The ACLU has a unique 68-year tradition in American political culture. This is the group that backed Clarence Darrow in the Scopes Monkey Trial, got James Joyce's *Ulysses* into American libraries, fought for the right of workers to strike and against laws that made interracial marriage a crime. So it's particularly sad, not to mention alarming, that on important issues of health and safety the ACLU is dead wrong.

Remember why those metal detectors were installed: the little matter of hijackings, or "skyjackings" as they were called in the late 1960s when the practice was discovered by mad gunmen and those interested in one-way flights to Havana. Because airport metal detector searches have worked and because, like Muzak, they've become a minor annoyance to which we don't pay much attention, we've almost forgotten the terror that brought them into being. In the 37 years before 1968, there were only seven hijackings. Over the next five years, hijackings (successful and attempted) averaged 27 a year.

James Bond

In 1973, the airlines began screening all passengers in major U.S. airports with metal detectors. Since then, the average number of annual hijackings and attempts has dropped to 7.4, a decrease that is even more dramatic when you consider that a high proportion of the hijacking attempts were in situations where metal detectors did not come into play. For instance, in the first six months of 1987, there were four attempted hijackings in the U.S., none of them successful. In one, a terrorist pulled a gun and grabbed a hostage at the ticket counter before he ever approached the metal detectors. Another involved a small plane in the Virgin Islands in which passengers were not required to be screened. The other two hijackers claimed to be armed but turned out to be bluffing. All totaled, airport security has nabbed 38,000 weapons, making 17,000 arrests and foiled, by the Federal Aviation Administration's count, some 117 potential hijackings since 1973. And who knows how many terrorists or self-proclaimed Messiahs were deterred from trying in the first place? It doesn't take a forensics expert to realize that metal detectors work. (It should be noted that they would work even better if they were used on checked as well as carry-on luggage.)

Effectiveness isn't everything, of course. A knock on the door by police in the middle of the night would be an "effective" way to seize contraband. It would also terrify the innocent. But people have passed through metal detector systems at U.S. airports 8.5 billion times without rising up in protest. Even the Association of Flight Attendants approves of the searches, not only for passengers but for its own members as well. And considering how well metal detectors have prevented hijackings (and perhaps as important, relieved Americans of that fear), it's no wonder that federal judges have ruled that all the precautions that go into these searches make them "minimally intrusive," "reasonable," and

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What does the ACLU say about the lives that would be lost without the metal detectors? "Regrettably, we live in dangerous times."

therefore constitutional. First of all, anyone can avoid them by electing not to fly. And, though many people don't know this, if the metal detector goes off, you can simply walk out of the airport the way you came in and it is illegal for security officers or police to detain you.

Why does the ACLU deem the devices that have saved lives "a grave threat" to civil liberties? Because they oppose on principle any safety measure where all passengers are searched, out of fear that it will lead to more oppressive measures. Yes, it's that old slippery slope. "The basis for it," says Alan Reitman, the Union's associate director and elder statesman, referring to the group's opposition, "is this dragnet nature of checking people who have not been charged when there's no indication that they are about to commit a crime. That weakens that Fourth Amendment protection."

The ACLU holds out as its standard searches that are based on "probable cause": targeting only those suspected of committing a crime. But judges recognize that this is a threshold that can be almost impossible to clear. Just as a practical matter, how can the TWA ground managers at O'Hare possibly have educated suspicions about the steady stream of anonymous faces flowing through the terminal. The same people who can't find your luggage would have to exhibit the combined talents of James Bond and the Amazing Kreskin. "Probable cause" searches have their own intrusiveness problems. Indeed, the ACLU opposed an earlier, targeted method of searching passengers who fit a hijacker's "behavioral profile." The Union claimed that authorities seemed to be singling out minorities and "persons with long hair."

No one has yet devised a deterrent to hijackers that is as effective but less intrusive than metal detectors. That—and not some ominous softening of America's resolve to protect its civil liberties—is why the courts and the public aren't in a cold sweat. Metal detectors prevent hijackings and murder and easily pass the Fourth Amendment test that government searches and seizures must not be "unreasonable."

What does ACLU policy #270 say about the lives that would be lost without the metal detectors? "Regrettably, we live in dangerous times."

The grenade

Thanks to the metal detectors we seem to have airplane hijacking under control, but other threats continue to mount. Consider what inner-city children face when they try to go to school. If they don't get knifed or shot by street gangs on the way, they risk buying it in math class. The percentage of students packing guns and other deadly weapons in school more than doubled between 1975 and 1986 in three out of the four American cities surveyed by Oliver Moles of the U.S. Department of Education. More than 27,000 youths between the ages of 12 and 15 were handgun victims in 1985, almost double the average number of the three previous years.

Among the most perilous places to be a school kid is Detroit. During the 1983-1984 school year, 325 weapons were seized inside the city's schools. The next year authorities reaped 456 weapons, while registering 70 felonious assaults against students and teachers in schools, on school grounds, or on the way to or from schools. The weapons involved in these incidents, according to *The Detroit News*, included "155 handguns, 222 knives, eight sawed-off shotguns, and one hand grenade, not to mention innumerable wrenches, ice picks, razors, and brass knuckles."

In late 1984, the Detroit school board took action. The board settled on a policy of surprise weapons "sweeps," a first-of-its-kind program of arms control. On certain mornings, with no advanced warning, school security personnel and Detroit police were to be posted at schools with hand-held and walk-through metal detectors.

Ever vigilant, the Michigan chapter of the ACLU sprang into action. During the spring and summer of 1985, the group's lawyers gathered evidence and found a willing plaintiff; by the time school resumed in the fall, the ACLU lawyers were in court, charging that the weapons searches were unconstitutional because they were administered without individualized suspicion.

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That following December Federal District Judge Avern Cohn side-stepped the ACLU's challenge on a legal technicality but put a temporary halt to the sweeps, chastising school authorities for their sloppy methods, the police presence, and the surprise nature of the searches.

Rattled and embarrassed, the school board had its lawyers draft new guidelines it hoped the judge would accept. Searches would no longer be random but targeted at schools where weapons had recently been found or gang violence was feared. The schools themselves, not the police, would administer the searches. Security personnel would be of both sexes. As with airport metal detectors, the point of the searches was not to catch criminals but to deter kids from bringing their weapons into school. Finally, the board promised no more surprises: students would be given advanced warning of any future searches. Satisfied, Judge Cohn allowed them to continue.

It wasn't a victory to savor. The board seemed to have painted itself into a corner by promising not to conduct surprise searches—where's the deterrence if students know which days their schools will be searched? Then there was the ACLU. Not satisfied with all the qualifications, the Union remained opposed to any kind of random search. Fearing another 15 rounds in court with the ACLU if it resumed the searches, the board sat on its hands for over a year.

Then on April 16, 1987, a 14-year old student at Detroit's Murray-Wright High School got into an argument with an upperclassman named Chester Jackson. He followed Jackson out of school, into the parking lot, pulled a gun, and shot him in the face. The killing of Chester Jackson might have gone unnoticed had he not been the school's star football player. Dead high-school athletes inspire more fear in big city officials than do potholes. Their ghosts haunt the front pages, fueling citizen anger. Within a month, the school board, under strong pressure from Coleman Young, the city's mayor, began using metal detectors again. The board addressed the "advanced warning" decree with the simple trick of posting signs saying that students are subject to weapons searches, without actually divulging on which day a specific school will be "swept." The Michigan ACLU has not ruled out the possibility of going back to court, says David Wineman, a member of the ACLU board.

Do these random sweeps work? Detroit authorities say they do, claiming the searches are a convincing deterrent. In addition to discouraging tough kids from bringing guns, the school officials hope the sweeps will convince kids who carry weapons only for self-defense—a major source of problems—to leave their weapons at home (or at least outside). The Michigan ACLU claims that school authorities would confiscate more weapons if the money now spent on sweeps was devoted to searching only individuals suspected of carrying weapons. But is it reasonable to assume that schools have on their staffs the Sherlock Holmeses needed to know which kid to suspect?

The ACLU's position is not only tragic, but disingenuous. It is a strong believer in handgun control, a limitation on the rights of individual gun owners for the sake of the community. Is it so distasteful for Detroit authorities to take similar communitarian measures to keep weapons out of inner-city public schools?

Gin-soaked breath

Alcohol-related driving accidents kill 25,000 people in this country every year, almost half the number of casualties in the entire Vietnam war. They injure nearly another million. To stem the carnage, 30 states now allow local law enforcement departments to set up sobriety checkpoints, where drivers are stopped for an average of a minute and asked a few questions to determine if they've been drinking. A Transportation Department study found sobriety checkpoints cut alcohol-related accidents by 13 percent.

The ACLU wants these outrageous searches stopped. ACLU policy #217 is quite explicit: "Roadblocks where drivers are stopped for sobriety testing without probable cause violate Fourth Amendment principles."

Sure, sobriety checkpoints, like toll booths, are an inconvenience, but they have the added advantage of saving lives. Judges have found that the checkpoints meet the Fourth Amendment's test of reasonableness. The aim is to nab drivers with gin-soaked breath, not those with copies of *Das Kapital* or *The Watchtower* stashed in the glove compartment. And it is not as though drivers are getting a body cavity search every time they take a run to the mall. Consider the rules governing California's sobriety checkpoints, which have been approved by the state Supreme Court despite the ACLU's challenge. At a California checkpoint, cops are not allowed to give you a citation for, say, a broken headlight or an expired inspection sticker. They can't even ask for your license unless they notice visible signs of drinking or drugs (or unless your .45 is on the dashboard). Police even have to publicize the date and in some cases the precise location of the checkpoint in newspapers and on TV and radio.

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There are some fronts on which the ACLU wages noble constitutional struggles. The gate to the Eastern shuttle is not one of them.

(The Transportation Department study judged the checkpoints "highly effective in capturing public attention.") For those who might have missed the announcement, the rules even mandate that police must post a lit sign far ahead announcing the presence of the roadblock so that motorists who don't wish to go through it can pull a U-turn and scram. (This gives you some sense of the state of intoxication of the 710 people arrested for drunk driving at California roadblocks in the winter of 1986.)

How do Californians feel about being crushed beneath this jackboot of oppression? At California Highway Patrol checkpoints, all drivers were given postage-paid survey cards to gauge their reaction. Of those who sent the cards back, 89.7 percent approved of the checkpoints. When random searches are done well, and for the right reasons, they don't inspire fear in the innocent.

As always, the ACLU argues over effectiveness. In its suit before the California Supreme Court, the Union suggested that, with the same resources and publicity given to checkpoints, the standard "probable cause" technique could save just as many lives. There's no data to prove this. But there are good reasons why courts have chosen to believe law enforcement officials who feel sobriety checkpoints are superior. It's not that easy for a cop to spot a drunk driver as the car speeds down the highway. Not all intoxicated drivers sway back and forth on the road like Keystone cops. Moreover, checkpoints provide an understandable deterrent that's missing from probable cause enforcement. Those of us who have, on occasion, rationalized driving after drinking know the tendency to promise oneself to "drive carefully" so as not to do damage or attract the attention of police. That rationalization doesn't hold up against checkpoints.

But then, arguing effectiveness is an act of hypocrisy for the ACLU. What would the Union say if those future studies demonstrate conclusively that checkpoints work better? "I think we'd still be opposed to them," replies Alan Schlosser, staff counsel with the ACLU of Northern California. Checkpoints, like airport metal detectors, are unacceptable, no matter how many lives they save. Regrettably, we live in dangerous times.

The engineer's joint

Awhile back, the Reagan administration, in its zeal to root out drugs, started testing the urine of federal employees, even those who push paper all day. Uncle Sam, it seemed, was becoming Big Brother and the ACLU rightly stepped in to fight. But even when it came to drug testing, the ACLU had an uncanny ability to stake out the most indefensible terrain.

The government has no pressing need to know about the drug habits of most of its work force. But is it fascism for the government to ensure that air traffic controllers, railroad engineers, and others who make the difference between life and death are unimpaired by drugs and alcohol? Too often they are stoned and drunk. Amtrak passengers, who take 20 million train trips a year, would be shocked to learn of the extent of the drinking problem in the railroad industry. A 1979 study found 23 percent of railroad operating employees were problem drinkers and many of those got drunk on the job. Drug abuse is also a serious problem. According to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), between 1975 and 1984 there were 48 train accidents, causing 37 fatalities and 80 injuries, in which drugs or alcohol were "directly affecting" causes.

So in 1986 the Transportation Department ruled that railroads had to begin testing employees for drugs as a condition of employment, after an accident and when trained supervisors had "reasonable cause" to believe an employee was impaired by drugs or alcohol. One final precaution was rejected: random testing. Officials from the railroad unions and the FRA felt random testing wasn't necessary.

All those precautions, however, failed on January 4 of last year, when the brakeman and engineer of a three-engine Conrail train shared a joint of marijuana on duty. Both were veteran railmen in their thirties. Both had just come under the gaze of a supervisor trained to spot

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signs of drug and alcohol use. ("Reasonable cause testing is keyed to the ability of a supervisor to detect symptoms," says a FRA study of the accident that was to follow.) Despite several warning signals, the impaired engineer failed to slow his train, instead driving through an intersection and onto a track in Chase, Maryland, just ahead of an Amtrak passenger train traveling at 105 miles per hour. The collision of the Amtrak train into the back of the Conrail locomotive left 16 people dead and 174 injured.

This crash and other data led Congress and the Transportation Department to reconsider the drug testing program. Government labor union leaders still oppose random testing. But significantly, Senators Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski, liberal Democrats from Maryland, a state with both a huge constituency of government employees and a lot of grieving family members of the train wreck victims, wound up supporting the random testing bill. So did the National Association of Rail Passengers, a public interest group.

The head of the FRA, John H. Riley, reversing himself, now favors random drug use testing. The reason: after a 24-month program of testing based on "reasonable cause," FRA studies show that 4 percent of all rail employees involved in accidents had recently used illicit drugs, and 1 percent had alcohol in their blood. "Although these numbers are relatively low," he said, "they represent a hard core of alcohol and drug users who have not been persuaded by prevention campaigns, have not been willing to take advantage of employee assistance programs, have avoided detection in scheduled testing conducted by the railroads, and have not been deterred by the reasonable cause testing program."

Drugs and alcohol threaten our skies and roads too. In 1986, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety asked 300 truck drivers in Tennessee to be tested. Thirty percent (of the 88 percent who volunteered) tested positive for "drugs with potential for abuse"; 14 percent tested positive for marijuana, 11 percent for speed, 2 percent for cocaine. In 1983, Greyhound, during a strike, took applications from experienced bus drivers: 30 percent tested positive for marijuana. The airline industry is also plagued. While there have been no big commercial air carrier accidents attributable to drugs or alcohol, there are risks to the Americans who take 418 million plane trips each year. Tests of general aviation pilots killed in fatal accidents found alcohol a contributing factor 10.5 percent of the time. And an inspector general's report revealed that more than 10,000 FAA certified pilots had their automobile licenses suspended or revoked for driving while intoxicated during the previous seven years.

The whole notion of testing people for drugs—"lifestyle choices" as one ACLU lawyer puts it—drives the Union crazy. ACLU attorneys have been burning out word processors writing court briefs and motions to defend workers. Sometimes, the Union has been on the side of the angels, as in their suit on behalf of postal service job applicants rejected on the basis of drug urine tests. The postal service has many problems, but the occasional stoned mailman misdelivering a letter is not one of them. More to the point, mail delivery is not a health or safety function. For the same reason, you have to like the ACLU for taking on the Tippecanoe County, Indiana, school system for forcing its cheerleaders to submit urine samples. But last year it fell short of sainthood, filing an amicus brief supporting federal workers who were suing the Transportation Department over its planned random testing of safety-sensitive government employees, mostly in the FAA. The ACLU opposes a bill passed by the Senate that would extend random tests to key railroad workers, pilots, truckers, and bus drivers.

Here again, the ACLU plays the "effectiveness" game. It points to the high error rate for initial drug screening tests and sloppy lab work as reason enough to reject drug use testing. Yet the Senate bill mandates elaborate and reliable confirmation tests, done at federally certified labs, to determine if an initial screening was accurate. The Union also points to electronic devices that test worker dexterity as an alternative to urine testing—though they don't endorse the use of these devices, either. But what if—as is likely—urine tests, or a combination of urine and dexterity tests, proved better than dexterity tests alone in deterring drug and alcohol use and saving lives? "Under no circumstances would we approve of urinalysis," said ACLU special assistant Loren Siegel, "no matter what the occupation."

When it comes to public safety, judges have, for the most part, resisted the most extreme arguments of the ACLU. (Don't expect to read headlines declaring airport metal detectors unconstitutional.) But the ACLU has been effective at conning the courts, state legislatures, regulatory agencies, and law enforcement offices into some lousy policies. (Consider the ban on surprise searches and the shooting of Chester Jackson in Detroit.) On drug testing, for instance, courts have issued a wide range of rulings—everything from approving random testing for

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racehorse jockeys to rejecting testing rail employees even after they have been in an accident. Is this any way to protect the nation's welfare?

Because the ACLU's arguments have at least in part been heeded, many of the safety procedures we do have are less effective than they might be. The crucial element of surprise, for instance, has been taken out of many of these measures even though it would ensure more safety with no infringement on personal liberty. Those warning signs at sobriety checkpoints hand the drunken driver a splendid opportunity to take a U-turn and threaten motorists on another road. Similarly, it seems odd that someone who sets off the alarm of an airport metal detector is allowed to waltz out of the terminal without being so much as questioned by airport security guards, let alone detained by police. Anyone unglued enough to try to sneak a pistol through a metal detector might be likely to use it on his way out the door.

The real threat

The ACLU's line on civil liberties is more trustworthy in the area of the First Amendment. Threats to the rights of free speech and political association may not be as great now as they have been in the past. But they do exist and the ACLU is fighting the right battle when opposing them.

One example is the McCarran-Walter Act, an embarrassing legacy of the McCarthy era that permits the federal government to deny visas to foreigners wishing to visit the United States. The act goes far beyond sensibly restricting terrorists, drug dealers, and the like to include those said to be a threat because of their political beliefs and affiliations. Writers, artists, academics, politicians, and in one case a former NATO general—usually critics of U.S. policy—have been refused admission. (Those willing to persevere can usually get special permission to enter the country. But the bureaucratic hoops and indignities dissuade others from even trying.) This deprives U.S. citizens of potentially valuable ideas, viewpoints, and personal contacts, while, in the eyes of the world, America itself is made to look paranoid and hypocritical. Denying an entry visa to Canadian Farley Mowat, who wrote that subversive Disney movie, *Never Cry Wolf,* provoked him to write a book about the experience called *My Discovery of America.*

An even more damaging example is government surveillance of peaceful dissident political groups in the U.S. We may have thought we ended this practice in the seventies when Congress reined in the FBI for its COINTELPRO operation. During the operation, which began in the sixties, FBI agents created secret files on tens of thousands of law-abiding Americans while snooping and sometimes disrupting the activities of antiwar and black power groups. However, the FBI apparently is still at it, having conducted a secret investigation since 1981 of a group called the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). The FBI started files on hundreds of CISPES members in an attempt to document terrorist links, yet never saw fit to charge anyone with a crime. Dragging the "national security" net so widely presents a much greater danger than the one the FBI was ostensibly concerned about: it threatens to cool political debate on important issues facing the country.

The ACLU has condemned the FBI for its CISPES investigation. And it's an old and bitter opponent of McCarran-Walter, lending its organizational weight to current congressional efforts to change the law. This is the kind of work in which the ACLU makes its greatest contribution to America. By comparison, fighting things like sobriety checkpoints seems dangerously misguided. The Union would be wise to concentrate its energies on the real dangers. Significantly, it was not the ACLU but another civil liberties group, The Center for Constitutional Rights, which filed the Freedom of Information Act requests that broke the CISPES affair.

If the ACLU would focus on the real dangers, it would see that the safety measures it is opposing so fanatically pose absolutely no threat to our political or religious liberties. The purpose of these measures is not to discover whether we are Republicans, Democrats, or Communists, or Protestants, Jews, or Catholics, or in any way inhibit us in the excercise of our political and religious freedoms. Nor do these safety measures pose any threat to the innocent. The metal detectors, the school sweeps, the sobriety checkpoints, and drug and alcohol testing are all designed to deter or apprehend those guilty of carrying concealed weapons, or of drug or alcohol abuse, all of which could result in the killing or maiming of innocent people. These measures do not even put the innocent in fear, as would, say, police pounding on our door in the night. Only the guilty have anything to fear. What is wrong with having the guilty worry about what they are doing and perhaps change their behavior as a result? What is wrong with keeping them from harming the rest of us? What is wrong with the ACLU? □

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

Michael S. Dukakis
105 Chauncy Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02111

Abigail Huffman
505 Court Street #5J
Brooklyn, NY 11231

January 6, 1988

"...work changes all of humanity into gold."
-- Sir William Osler (1849-1919)

Dear Abigail:

You are invited to join a select group of genuinely committed donors who have turned ideals into action...individuals who are working together to make my Presidential candidacy a reality.

I am asking you this personally because as the critical contests approach, I need you now more than ever as an integral part of the Dukakis team.

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Authorized and paid for by the Dukakis for President Committee, Inc.
105 Chauncy Street, Boston, MA 02111.

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Then, you can feel satisfied that you've truly done your part to turn ideals into action.

I hope recent newspaper articles about our fundraising success haven't given you the impression that we have all the funds we need. Nothing could be further from the truth!

We are still far short of our fundraising needs. We need to raise funds this month before we can:

* hire the additional staff we desperately need in key Super Tuesday states (your donation of $1,000 will support 5 additional staff people for two weeks, and every week counts!)
* purchase critical television ad time in dozens of expensive Super Tuesday media markets

Because of your past support, I know you understand that it takes more than talk to make things happen. That's only a beginning. Good old-fashioned hard work must follow.

And teamwork. You and I believe that the efforts of a united few can bring about true opportunity for every American in every state.

Further, as you know we don't take political action committee (PAC) money, so I can count only on the help of people like you, hard working responsible men and women who know me and know my beliefs and values.

The Dukakis for President Gold Card is truly special. It symbolizes what together you and I stand for. It identifies you as a genuinely committed person, one who knows it takes more than lip-service to elect a President.

Help make our goal a reality. Just complete the enclosed application and return it in the postage-paid envelope. As soon as we receive it, your exclusive Dukakis for President Gold Card will be on its way to you.

Thank you very much for your past support and friendship.

Warmest personal regards,

Michael S Dukakis

P.S. Time is running out. There are less than thirty days before the first caucus. Our financial needs are more crucial than ever. To become a Gold Card Charter Member, vote with your contribution before the first votes are cast on February 8, at the Iowa caucuses.

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The Strait of Hommus

There's more to the Persian Gulf war than geopolitics. A report from the scene.

by Tony Horwitz

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—The shipping agent from Bombay lowers his teacup and whispers. "I know a vessel that leaves the Gulf tonight," he says. "From the Dubai Creek at three. If there is no Iranian trouble, you will reach the Strait of Hormuz after dawn."

Outside his office, along the creek that winds through Dubai and into the Persian Gulf, Iranian traders are unloading pistachios and Persian carpets, ferried illicitly from Bandar Abbas. Outgoing sailors pile their teakwood dhows with Marlboros, Levis, and Panasonic boom boxes for the 12-hour return to Iran.

"You have never met me and do not know my name," says the agent, who traffics this night in contraband reporter. "I do this for you only, as a favor." He nods his head toward the door.

I have come to Dubai like a thousand other journalists to see the war firsthand. It is here, in an oil-rich port 50 miles from Iranian territory, where shellshocked supertankers limp in for repairs. It is in Dubai, too, that television networks rent helicopters for $2,000 an hour, to hover above the water for shots of Iranian speedboats and burning oil rigs.

But at the creek in Dubai, there is another Persian Gulf, one that doesn't often appear in nightly newscasts or geopolitical thinking. Each night, a workday fleet of fishing trawlers, traders, and supply boats jostle for moorings between shifts on the open water. Every war has them, little people, caught in the crossfire. I joined a supply boat carrying dried goods to ships off the coast of Fujairah. Through the eyes of the crew the conflict looks completely different.

The dockside customs official weighs my passport and visa in his hand, barely glancing at their contents. "Your papers, I think maybe they are not in order," he says, looking as if he might bite one corner to test for counterfeit.

I force a smile. "Perhaps I have caused some inconvenience by arriving at this late hour."

Tony Horwitz is a free-lance writer based in Cairo.

Flowery language is the Muzak of Arab officialdom. "Certain arrangements of a financial kind can. . . ."

". . . Please, no," the man says, his face wrinkling in disgust. Here in the world's wealthiest nation, even to offer a bribe is insulting. He waves toward the water.

The Bombay agent's boat is a 65-foot workhorse, snub-nosed and broad across the beam. On the deck stands a muscular young Indian with curry on his breath. "I am Lawrence of Goa," he says. "Do not be afraid. The captain knows where the mines are. Maybe." Captain Kochrekar, a fine-boned man with long black curls, sits crosslegged before the wheel. Still chewing on Lawrence's "maybe," I ask him about the danger of traveling through the Gulf at night. "Wherever there is lightness there is also dark," he says in a lilting Indian accent. "A man must make his own map for the shadows." Lawrence of Goa unties the boat and Captain Kochrekar steers us toward the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf. Neon Arabic blinks from the buildings lining the Dubai Creek. Offshore terminals blink back. Then we are swallowed up by the night. Kochrekar navigates without lights. The Gulf isn't the sort of place where anyone wants to attract attention.

Workers caught in war

Not that there is much of an audience. Except for a lonely coast guard patrol boat sweeping past us in the dark and a few container ships at anchor, we sight no other traffic for the first two hours at sea.

But the quiet is deceptive. Gunboats and rockets pose little danger to Kochrekar's craft, an Arab-owned supply boat that provisions oil tankers with spare parts, fresh crews, and food. It is mines strewn indiscriminately across the shipping lanes that threaten destruction. "A mine is like a snake," Kochrekar says, studying the dark water through binoculars. "It does not think

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before striking."

The captain's engineer, Jesudasyn, studies a nautical map while munching a chapati. The chart shows a legion of penciled circles stretching from Dubai to the Hormuz Strait. Each dot marks a mine the crew spotted before.

"What would happen to this boat if it hit a mine?"

"Like this," Jesudasyn says, brushing crumbs from his trouser leg.

I decide to add my own eyes to the night watch. There is a momentary flare as gas burns off at a distant oilfield, then black sea and black sky stretching all the way to Iran. We could be sailing through an inkwell.

Kochrekar tells me that on his last trip south another supply boat exploded a few hundred yards ahead of him. He ended up lifting a corpse from the sea. "The man was not broken but he was swollen with water, like a fish," he says. The rest of the crew came ashore in pieces.

The plight of Kochrekar and his crew is made more cruel by their not being a party to the Iran-Iraq war. Like most Gulf proletarians, they were carried here in the subcontinental drift that swept millions of Indians and Pakistanis to oil-rich Arabian shores. At the oil boom's peak, "guest workers" in the United Arab Emirates outnumbered natives five to one.

But the relationship has always been one of economic convenience, which is now being threatened by falling oil prices and by the tanker war. Already, Iran and Iraq have sunk more than a third of the total merchant tonnage sunk in World War II. Most of the 300-plus human casualties have been Korean, Indian, Filipino, and Pakistani, including one Indian mechanic killed in November by American Navy fire.

"I chose the sea because it is a peaceful place," says Kochrekar, a fifth-generation seaman who sailed from his native Bombay 30 years ago. "But this is, what do you call it? I think it is Russia Roulette."

To Lawrence of Goa it is mostly tedium. While his mates stand watch in the wheelhouse, he shells crabs in the cabin, peppering them from spice jars labeled Tang, Nescafe, and Super Chunky Peanut Butter. When he isn't stirring curry, Lawrence adds to an already epic-length letter to his wife in Goa, on India's west coast. He pauses to show me a snapshot of his sari-clad bride, standing in what looks like a tropical paradise of white sand, blue water, and waving palm trees.

I ask him what he has to write about these long empty nights at sea. "Nothing," he says. "So I write how I love her and how I count the days until we be together in Goa again."

Today's count is 210.

The crew's salary—$900 a month, plus board—is far more than what they'd earn in Bombay. But the men squirrel their pay away for the three months they spend each year with their families in India. When docked in Dubai, they sleep in bunk beds on the boat, cook curry in the cabin, and watch Indian movies on their VCR. It is as if they've never really come ashore.

"I am not interested in these Arabs," says Jesudasyn, a sturdy Tamil from Madras. "Only in their money."

Economically at the bottom of Gulf society, the Indians consider themselves morally and culturally superior. "We are not so barbaric as this," Jesudasyn says, showing me a news clip from Dubai about an Arab man who has two wives and 32 children—and wants more of both. Even more contemptible, the crewmen feel, is the Islamic law that permits Arab men to shed their wives by saying "I divorce thee" three times in succession. "In India a man and woman are one until the funeral pyre," Kochrekar says.

At daybreak, the Gulf becomes a whitish haze, and we churn across it as if through a giant bowl of milk. As the mist clears, the water turns a brilliant cobalt blue, the color a child paints the ocean.

And the water remains astonishingly empty. The Gulf of nightly news clips is a cluttered bathtub, with tankers and warships packed so tightly they barely have room for incoming Exocets. The reality is an azure expanse almost twice the size of New York State. There are a lot more sea turtles than frigates.

Battleships and fisherman

Supertankers, some the length of several football fields, are indecently exposed in waters so open. It is not surprising, then, that when a morning rush hour finally forms on the horizon, the tankers are bunched in convoys of three and four and tailed by battleships bristling with cannon and radar. It reminds me of walking to kindergarten with my older brother.

"This is the U.S. warship 993," crackles the party line on Kochrekar's radio. "Ship on starboard, please identify yourself, and what is your intention?"

Nearby, a more collegial show-and-tell is in progress. "British warship this is Soviet warship. Thank you for identifying yourself. We wish you

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The plight of Kochrekar and his crew is made more cruel by their not being a party to the Iran-Iraq war.

a bon voyage."

"Cheers, captain," a toffish voice replies. "A safe journey to you and your crew."

But the Tennessee drawl on warship 993 is still questioning its starboard stranger. "Who are you and what is your intention?"

There is an ominous silence. Then a high-pitched cackle fills the airwaves. "It's the Fil-i-peeno Mon-key! Who wants some Fil-i-peeno ba-NAN-a?"

Kochrekar laughs. The voice, he explains, belongs to a renegade radio hacker, code-named Filipino Monkey, who likes to break in at tense moments with obscenities and animal noises.

"It's the Mon-KEEEEE!" the voice shrieks again. "Come and get my ba-NAAAAAAN-a!"

Shippers have been trying to trace the Monkey for three years, without success. "You see, even in wartime a man can find laughter," Kochrekar says, turning off the radio.

The tension on board has eased with the passing of night. By day, a mine should be obvious at 100 yards or more. Kochrekar even lets me take the wheel while he goes below for breakfast.

Playing captain proves much more difficult than it appears. I point toward an island on the horizon, but the bow keeps bobbing, like a compass needle. By the time Kochrekar returns, I'm trying to pull us out of a skid straight at the Iranian coast.

"You must let no current move you from the path you have chosen," he says, taking the wheel. It occurs to me that no matter how simple, Kochrekar's statements seem lifted from the *Upanishads*.

Jesudasyn's inspiration comes from the Bible. A recent Christian convert, he spends the morning reading aloud from a fundamentalist text written in Tamil. The cover shows a crowd of copper-colored sinners, moving towards a burning pyre. Only a few emerge from the flames to ascend towards a shimmering crown.

"I do not understand these Christian gods," Kochrekar confides as Jesudasyn mumbles in Tamil. "But it makes no difference. Each man must find his own map for the lightness and the dark."

It is midday when Kochrekar shakes me awake at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz. He knows this is the highlight of his passenger's journey. Like any location that has been in the news too long, the Gulf—and the Strait in particular—is angling for some kind of record in the cliche stakes. During a typical week last fall, I read that the U.S. is Engulfed and All at Sea and Steering into Rough Water because Iran might mine the Oil Chokepoint, Straitjacket It, Turn Off the Tap on the Free World's Energy Lifeline. The Strait of Hommus, one colleague calls it. I must see the real thing before I drown in the metaphorical one.

What I find, staring into the midday sun, is a seasnake slithering past our bow and a dolphin poking its nose above water. The rugged cliffs of Oman rise on one side of the channel, the softer hills of Iran are shrouded in haze on the other. And the 49 miles between are an untroubled stretch of aquamarine.

A long, grey supertanker crawls through the Strait, spitting water and belching black smoke. Silhouetted against it is a wooden Omani fishing dhow, with a broad white sail and upturned prow, like a miniature Viking ship. As I watch through binoculars, six men in white robes and turbans drape hand-held lines in the water, calmly reeling in one red snapper after another. The men are smiling. "At night they burn paper fires so other ships won't run them over," Kochrekar says. Otherwise, the fishermen carry on as they have for centuries, oblivious to mines and missiles.

When I look through binoculars again, the boat has moved off and all I see is a flash of white robes and red fish against blue water. It is the most contented vision of labor I have ever clapped eyes on. Stepping onto the deck, the breeze tastes fresh and salty, the sun is warm and

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soothing. The Gulf looks clear enough to drink. A seagull circles overhead. And I feel a sudden urge to go swimming in The World's Most Dangerous Waterway.

There is a shout from the wheelhouse. I turn around to find Jesudasyn pointing at the water, just ahead. Kochrekar swings the wheel and Lawrence rushes to the rail to peer over the edge. A circle of light flashes in the water, just off our port bow.

"My God!" Lawrence cries. The boat is directly over it now. "Sardines! Thousands of them! Oh what I'd give for a net!"

We come ashore in Fujairah at dusk, just as a small fleet of fishing dhows heads out to sea. I duck below when the Coast Guard appears and again as the harbormaster steers us into port.

The men tie up at the dock and settle in for another evening aboard their odd little capsule. Lawrence starts a fresh round of curry. Jesudasyn flicks through a collection of videos and chooses *The Ten Commandments*. In eight hours, they will take on supplies and head back to sea to service oil tankers off Fujairah.

"Next time we meet in Goa, with my beautiful wife," Lawrence says, offering me some incendiary curry.

Kochrekar is sitting crosslegged in the cabin again, studying charts beneath a 20-watt bulb. I point at the weak light and he smiles. "Tomorrow there will be more shadows!"

There is much dark and little lightness as I walk away from the water. Ahead lies a low concrete hut marked "Immigration," then the long trip overland to the journalists' ghetto in Dubai. It has been a peaceful day on the water.

I turn to watch the sun sink into the Gulf. In the gathering dark, the sea and sky wash together in a canvas of blue. Then the last bit of light drains away. And one by one the fishing boats ignite their paper flames, fanning out like fireflies across the night. □

WHO'S WHO

Insiders say the real test of **Frank Carlucci**'s willingness to cut the defense budget will come on the two supercarriers that he has proposed canceling. The admirals are determined to resist and they are skilled at playing the Washington game. . . .

There has been an embarrassing development for the administration—an outbreak of hostilities between two cabinet secretaries. **Donald Hodel** of Interior has accused **John Herrington** of Energy of opposing Hodel's proposal to tear down the O'Shaughnessy Dam in Yosemite National Park and restore the valley behind it to its natural state because Herrington was worried about his future job prospects. "I have to go back to California when this is over and this is going to be an aggravation for me," Herrington is alleged to have told Hodel, who in turn said that he was "taken aback that a cabinet officer would be focusing on that kind of an issue instead of the merits." . . .

Federal law prohibits congressmen from placing a relative on their payroll. But as any old Washington hand knows, there is a way around every rule. In this case the route leads through congressional committees and administrative offices. For example, **Craig Obey**, the son of Rep. **David Obey**, works for the Senate Special Committee on Aging, and last summer Rep. **Bruce Vento** had one son on the staff of the House postmaster and another working for the House doorkeeper. . . .

James Baker's new **Dick Darman** is said to be **Robert Zoellick**, who has just been given the formal title of counselor to the secretary at Treasury. . . .

A key position in the budget process, director of the Congressional Budget Office, which previously has been held by **Alice Rivlin** and by **Rudolph G. Penner**, has been open since last March. The reason is a fight between House Budget Committee members and their Senate counterparts over who will fill the job. . . .

The secret of the turnaround in the Gephardt campaign that brought him from 6 percent to 30 percent in just six weeks was his new speechwriter **Robert Shrum**. For those who don't remember, Shrum was the author of the Edward Kennedy speech that electrified the 1980 Democratic convention. He got his Ph.D. in spin control while many of his opponents were still freshmen. As a result, most of the reporters who cover the Iowa campaign will, as they look back over the years to come, realize that it was Shrum who told them what to think and when to think. . . .

In—*Defense:* Undersecretary for Acquisition—**Robert B. Costello**, Assistant Secretary for Acquisitions and Logistics—**Jack Katzen**. *Interior:* Director, Bureau of Land Management—**W. Timothy Locke**. *Justice:* Chief of Staff—**Mark Levin**. Assistant Attorney General, Land and Natural Resources—**Roger J. Marzulla**. *State:* Assistant Secretary, Economics—**Eugene J. McAllister**. Ambassador to Portugal—**Edward Morgan Rowell**. *Postal Service:* Postmaster General—**Anthony M. Franck**.

Out—*White House:* Senior Associate Counsel—**C. Christopher Cox**. *Housing and Urban Development:* Assistant Secretary, Congress and Legislation—**Stephen May**. *National Transportation Safety Board:* Member and Vice Chairman—**Patricia Goldman**.

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BOOK AWARDS

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY wishes to recognize the following books published during 1987 for their special contribution to understanding this country and its problems.

Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, Alan S. Murray Random House
Showdown at Gucci Gulch
(reviewed June 1987)

Allan Bloom Simon and Schuster
The Closing of the American Mind
(reviewed September 1987)

Robert Kuttner Viking
The Life of the Party
(see page 46)

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He vanquishes the vanities of the rich, but lacks the courage to say what he admires.

Two Cheers For Tom Wolfe

by Jonathan Alter

In his memorable introduction to *The New Journalism,* a 1973 collection of classic magazine pieces, Tom Wolfe declared that modern American fiction was dead. The novel had lost touch with its roots, he wrote, with the "joys of detailed realism and its strange powers." Wolfe thought the new king of letters was journalism, which could provide the texture and insight of Dickens or Dostoevsky with the added benefit of being true.

For young journalists, this was intoxicating stuff. Why feel guilty about that abandoned novel in the desk drawer? The future was in reporting. And reporting was suddenly more than just relevant or fun. While Woodward and Bernstein were busy proving that journalism could bring down the government, Wolfe showed how it could change writing and enrich the culture. The idea of applying the techniques of fiction to journalism, if not original to Wolfe, nonetheless kicked off a golden age in American journalism. Even his worst imitators could not dim the importance of what he had done.

Then, after the enormous success of *The Right Stuff*, Wolfe changed his mind. He embarked on a novel, which first was serialized in *Rolling Stone*. The original installments, often written under extreme deadline pressure, were engaging but unsatisfying. When the novel appeared, it was clear why. Wolfe's original protagonist was a famous Upper East Side novelist; now he was a bond trader on Wall Street. The substitution was essential to the book's success.

For something had changed in New York. Since the 1920s, the reigning cultural con men—the ones who cut the widest swath in the life of the city, whatever their real talent—had been in the arts. Wall Street was just a place where you made a living. But by the mid-1980s, this was no longer true. The biggest con artists were no longer artists.

That meant that satirizing bloated literary or artistic figures was suddenly not much of a public service. In the classic *"W"* formulation, Norman Mailer and Leonard Bernstein were Out; Saul Steinberg (the financier, not *The New Yorker* cartoonist) and John Gutfreund (the chief of Salomon Bros.) were In. And it wasn't just that a few corporate raiders found their names in the papers all the time. The status was trickling down. Before long, bond traders were not only making a fortune, they were actually getting laid more than sculptors from the Village, a remarkable social transformation.

There's little need to reprise the uproarious and exhaustively reviewed highlights of this book.* "Lemon Tarts" (the gorgeous young blonds on the arms of septuagenarian billionaires) and "social X rays" (Pat Buckley and Nan Kempner types; too rich and too thin) may soon enter the language along with "radical chic," "The Me Decade" and Wolfe's other nonfiction contributions. The Bavardage dinner party is as revealing as any cooked up by Proust. The speakerphone conference call with Gene Lopwitz (supposedly based on Gutfreund) should shame that instrument of communication out of existence. Peter Fallow, Wolfe's freeloading British tabloid journalist, has a friend who writes Marxist diatribes while supporting himself with fluffery in *House and Garden* (Alexander Cockburn call home). From now on, any husband planning to phone his mistress will make sure not to leave the house and absent-mindedly call his own number, as Sherman McCoy did.

The list of great moments could go on for as long as a New York party, and often has. This is one of those rare trendy books that people do not just pretend to read.

Jonathan Alter is a senior writer at Newsweek *and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

**The Bonfire of the Vanities.* Tom Wolfe. *Farrar, Straus, Giroux, $19.95.*

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Drawing by Vint Lawrence

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The wonderful thing is that by succeeding, Wolfe may help American fiction in much the same way he helped American nonfiction. He has mustered one of the first expeditionary forces aimed at liberating the novel from its post-modern oppressor, which sometimes goes by the name of minimalism. Whatever its slender attributes, the minimalist fashion has clearly grown out of hand in recent years. It has almost gotten to the point where if something actually happened in a novel, beyond a walk on the beach or a meaningful sigh, then by definition it had to be second-rate "genre" fiction—a thriller, mystery, or spoof.

Many of Wolfe's critics wrongly assail it along these lines: funny and smart but not "real" literature, whatever that means. The characters aren't deep enough, they say; they're too broad and cartoonish, too full of curlicues that signify nothing. If that has a familiar ring, it's because it resonates of Wolfe's old quarrel with *The New Yorker*, home of the Nothing Happens school of short story writing, which extends back to his famous early-1960s attack on William Shawn in the old *New York Herald Tribune Sunday Magazine*. The struggle later surfaced over another medium: architecture. The point of *From Bauhaus to Our House* was that minimalism offended Wolfe in any form. He sees spare, fine lines as signs of boredom more often than beauty. Glass boxes stink. Beaux arts is beautiful.

Obviously there are limits to the importance of external design. Wolfe overdoes descriptions of clothes and furniture: just because *he* dresses to make a statement doesn't mean that everybody does. Still, there is much that is right about his emphasis on details. Novels are in large part about observation, and this is the most fully reported work of fiction in years. It used to be that much great American literature was written by former reporters like Stephen Crane or Ernest Hemingway; now it's written by graduates of creative writing workshops. The difference shows here, in the legwork. It is the richness of detail that moves Wolfe's characters beyond stereotypes and makes them into people that we can all recognize. Satirized. Larger than life. But real.

Through the fools' eyes

This alone would make *Bonfire* significant. But Wolfe has the advantage of something else—timing. Just one step ahead of the conventional wisdom, he made Wall Street the villain. Wolfe knew that what he called "plutography"—graphic depiction of the glorious lives of the rich and famous—couldn't last, and he devoted himself to hastening its demise. Along with *Spy* magazine, founded in 1986, he rode the wave perfectly. For Wolfe and for *Spy*, the stock market crash came not as a shock but as a validation. Everyone else in New York is now scrambling to catch up. Suddenly *New York* magazine has stopped puffing the John Gutfreunds of the world and started trashing them, which is the way it should have been in the first place. It's easier now, when they're down. Wolfe did it when they were up; he realized that this worshipping of rich shit-heads had gone too far.

"Masters of the Universe" is a wonderful way of summarizing how terrific these guys thought they were. And Sherman, who coins the phrase, is a sympathetic character because he removes that little gnawing idea that some readers have about these young millionaire investment bankers and traders—the idea, buried inside too many of us, that their fabulous success actually proves that they are smarter than everyone else. Sherman is such a pathetic guy that we know, just know, that the men he symbolizes are nothing much either. And that's healthy. The fact that the crash made it obvious—and thus created an instantly receptive audience for Wolfe's book—is what one might call earned good fortune.

Of course, besides being a novel of manners, *Bonfire* is a novel of race and class. That's what makes it a *political* book. Race and class are frequently avoided by modern minimalist novelists, who cannot imagine that such concerns might be relevant to the identity crises of their characters. Wolfe puts these issues at the center of the novel. And the subtleties are right. There's a terrific scene, for instance, where Lawrence Kramer, the young lawyer, feels inferior to a haughty British nanny he's hired until she makes a racist comment, which immediately allows him to feel superior again. That's because spoken racism is gauche in liberal, professional Manhattan. Racists must observe the proper etiquette, which is to pretend that they are not.

Wolfe has long made a subspeciality of pushing these buttons on race and class. "Radical Chic" (where he made fun of Leonard Bernstein's 1969 party for the Black Panthers) and "Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers" (a description of the way black poverty activists intimidated white bureaucrats) seemed to white liberals to confirm that the Virginia-born author was a racist.

Bonfire fuels the flames of that old fight, and for reasons that may not be immediately ap-

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parent. First, there's the matter of literary device. Including Sherman, Wolfe goes inside the heads of about half a dozen characters. None of these people are portrayed in an especially flattering light and most look like fools. But at least the rest of the world is seen through their eyes for a few pages. Those eyes are never black. Wolfe will walk in Sherman's shoes or Fallow's, but not in those of Rev. Bacon (the media-manipulating, rabble-rousing Harlem minister) or Henry Lamb (the teenager Sherman and his mistress run over in their car). In fact, besides Lamb and his mother, blacks in the novel are either corrupt or simply barbarians ready to storm the gates of civilization. Wolfe is correct that this is a reflection of how white Manhattan views Harlem and the Bronx. But how about the way Harlem and the Bronx view white Manhattan? Other than targeting rich whites for money and manipulation—Rev. Bacon's approach—the black view gets lost. Blacks are either a mob or exotic urban fauna. They are never seen as individuals.

Of course, it could be argued that the point-of-view question is irrelevant because *no one* in the book comes out looking good. This is satire, and satire is often set in a world without heroes. Besides, there's an original and bracing quality to Wolfe's nihilism. It's just plain funnier to dump on everyone—with an extra kick in the teeth to the people who are rich and powerful enough to take it. That is *Spy*'s secret, too.

Real courage

But the rough equality achieved by trashing everyone and everything carries a steep price. This is a novel about New York that doesn't capture the joy that the city brings to so many people—it doesn't explain why New Yorkers (including Wolfe himself) put up with all the lunacy instead of moving away. In that sense, it is not the complete book on the culture of the city. The explanation of why people want to live there may be obvious to New Yorkers—so obvious, apparently, that it never needs to be said. (Shelly the juror, for instance, never has to say why she wants Kramer's help in getting an apartment in Manhattan). At the same time, the rest of the country thinks it's just as obvious that anyone who actually lives there is crazy. Wolfe never reconciles the two. He shares the unspoken assumption of his fellow New Yorkers but assumes the essential critique of non-New Yorkers.

More important, as many critics have pointed out, Wolfe suggests a hopelessness about New York's problems of race and class, as if those chasms really are unbridgeable—not even worth trying to bridge. Dickens always had at least one redeeming character—say, Pip in *Great Expectations*—who carried within him the seeds of hope. Wolfe has no one.

Or practically no one. There is Martin, the detective who, to Kramer's horror, tells the tough black guy to move his car. And Kovitsky, the Bronx judge assigned to Sherman's case who stands up to the thugs populating the courtroom. Sherman himself is even redeemed a bit at the end of the novel when, stripped of his phony dignity, he goes to court without fear. Why does Wolfe like these men? For the same reason he admired Chuck Yeager in *The Right Stuff*. The value that Wolfe admires above all others is physical courage, as he readily admits.

In a recent interview with *Insight*, the newsmagazine of *The Washington Times*, Wolfe said: "I think of *Huckleberry Finn*. There's a chapter on Col. Sherwood, who has saved somebody from lynching. A mob approaches his house, but he comes out to the front, and it's not a mob anymore. I think of that type of figure, of what it means to physically confront something very bad in the name of something worthwhile. That is always admired."

In the name of something worthwhile. But what? A closer reading of *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that Col. Sherburn, not Sherwood, was saving not some poor innocent, but himself, a cold-blooded murderer. That's the unresolved issue in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. It sometimes seems that Wolfe believes the notion of physical courage is itself worthwhile. This, at bottom, is what has always so infuriated liberals about him. "Radical Chic" and "Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers" were not just charges of paternal racism, not just gibes at naive liberalism—they were essays that said to whites: you are appeasers. And why were they appeasing blacks? Because they were scared of them. This was the subtext. Wolfe was affronting the manhood of these white liberals, many of whom wouldn't go to Vietnam, and that hurt.

For Wolfe, making that point—twisting the knife with relish—was worthwhile. If you're a bleeding heart, you may end up hurt, bleeding real blood! Or it could be that the positive value he has been upholding all these years is simply order. That would explain the Col. "Sherwood" reference. The white lynch mobs of the 19th century have become the black lynch mobs of the 20th, a peculiar and disturbing implication on Wolfe's part. Or maybe the "worthwhile" thing

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to do is simply play the old New York game, which *Spy* is now playing so well: figure out who's Out a step ahead of everyone else—for instance, anticipating that Gutfreund would be Out—then reap the praise. That is the more cynical explanation of Wolfe's prescience in writing this book. Then again, cynicism is now In, as *Spy*'s success tells us.

Whatever the explanation, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* is clearly missing some critical sense of commitment. It's not enough, in literature, simply to stand up for bravery. The question should always be: Courage for what? Moral courage? The courage of convictions? The courage required for love? In attacking the liberal dogma of the 1960s, Wolfe showed the social and journalistic equivalent of physical bravery. Another variation would be the Wall Street courage to bet the house on a hunch, as Sherman might do. But committing capital—or New York social suicide—is not the same as committing yourself. For years, Wolfe has had the courage to say what he is against, while avoiding the responsibility to say what he is for. Doing so might put him at risk of looking foolish. It might open him up to the ridicule of some new Tom Wolfe.

But suggesting that Wolfe (not to mention *Spy*) need some "commitment" is not an argument for ruining them. Cervantes and Shakespeare proved that humor and commitment can coexist; they loved the men they made fun of.

With similar empathy, Wolfe's powers of observation could have been harnessed to something more noble than tweaking New York. If he had mustered the courage to stand up for something he believed in, the novel would have been richer—infinitely richer than Lopwitz—and the world in which it is set a less forsaken place. □

THE DEMOCRATS: TWENTY YEARS AFTER RFK

Robert Kuttner should learn it takes more than money to make a good Democrat

Stop Pandering to the Middle Class

by Matthew Cooper

In a campaign that's not brimming with memorable one-liners, the best is probably Paul Simon's: "I'm not a neo-anything." It's a claim we've heard before. The I'm-the-real-Democrat speech has become a staple of presidential races. In 1980, Ted Kennedy ripped into Jimmy Carter for abandoning the Democratic faith. In 1984, Walter Mondale boasted that he was no imposter, just "a down-home Democrat who believes in fighting for people."

But what does it mean to be a good Democrat? Since 36 states have voted consistently Republican in four of the last five presidential elections, would it be wise and considered counsel for Democrats to rethink their party's attachment to programs like Medicare and Social Security? Or is it better to bolt the door, draw the shades, and start firing from the second floor?

Those who want to pull out their Smith & Wessons will find a ready ally in Robert Kuttner. An economics writer for *The Boston Globe* and *The New Republic*, Kuttner warns Democrats not to become like those neo-anythings who want to cut entitlement programs. His last book focused on economics, arguing that the liberal programs of the New Deal and the Great Society are not

Matthew Cooper is an editor of The Washington Monthly

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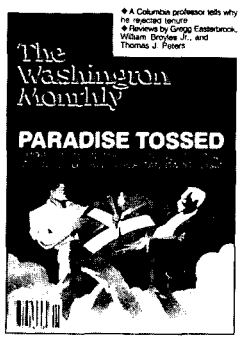

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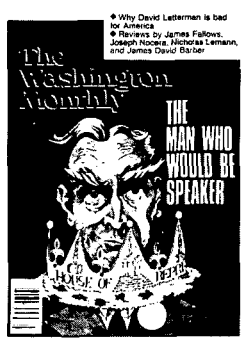

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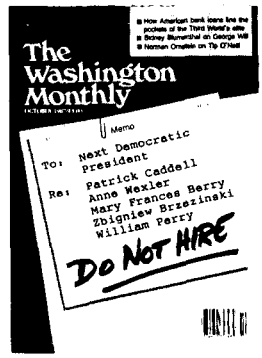

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only fair but spur growth. Now he turns his attention to politics,* contending that Democrats who expand benefits like Social Security and Medicare can earn a round of applause in the voting booth. For Kuttner, the political salvation of Democrats, "the life of the party," is economics. Hazy themes of a "new generation" (Gary Hart), or "leadership" (Walter Mondale), or even important questions of foreign policy (George McGovern), or social issues (George Wallace) won't fly.

If you've read his articles, many of which were adapted for this book, you know Kuttner is not only sharp but a competent writer. (To my mind he's pulled off the most impressive of achievements—being able to begin sentences with "The dollar" and take them to the period in a way that you can both enjoy and understand.) And it's refreshing to read something so fiercely opinionated that it treats "bipartisanship" like a four-letter word. For Kuttner, "partisan" is an accolade; politicians he likes are dubbed "good Democrats."

Much of his political blueprint for the party seems well designed. Democratic politicians should spend fewer afternoons lunching with PAC contributors and more late nights coming up with a plan to reach out to working-class voters. But Kuttner's careful criticisms of the Democratic party make his reckless proposals, like his insistence that it expand entitlements without targeting those in need, all the more disheartening. The adrenalin that fuels the book also drives it into ditches. Like Paul Simon, he seems to have convinced himself that he's the sole keeper of the flame. (Democrats and policies he doesn't like are "bloodless," "sterile," "managerial.") But in his obsession with economics, Kuttner has produced a vision of the Democratic party that seems antiseptic. In his defense of liberalism, he disregards much of what ails it and can revive it.

Coal and turkey

For Kuttner, how the Democratic party squandered its majority is the story of its failure to bring home the goods. Franklin Roosevelt endeared voters to the government and the party through Social Security, rural electrification, and veterans' benefits. " 'Tax and tax, spend and spend' is a scornful description of the Democrats popularized by Ronald Reagan," writes Kuttner. "But the original version of the phrase, attributed to FDR's aide Harry Hopkins, went: 'Tax and tax, spend and spend, *elect and elect*!' " Truman and Kennedy kept the flame burning, writes Kuttner. With the Great Society, Lyndon Johnson bound more voters to the party. "Although the older local Democratic party machine—of the much sentimentalized bucket of coal and Christmas turkey—was quite moribund by the 1960s, the newer federal programs served just as well to cement party allegiances."

But by the end of Johnson's term, the party was falling apart, not only over war and race, Kuttner says, but over a failure to retain its commitment to expanding those pocketbook programs. "The party of all the people, which made room for factory workers, urban bosses, uptown reformers, Southern racists, socialist intellectuals, rural populists, diverse ethnic minorities, and more, was bitterly divided over ideology, class, cultural style, and party rules," writes Kuttner. "The fault lines in a coalition party became open chasms. Its sprawling strength had become brawling weakness."

Then came Carter whom Kuttner all but calls a wimp, not because he wouldn't stand up to Brezhnev, but because he wouldn't expand health care, student loans, and housing subsidies. Without the party sticking to its guns on economic issues, its increasing liberalism on social issues became its weakness.

This is a truncated picture of how Americans shifted party loyalties over two generations. The political balance between the two parties was altered by a large assortment of factors which Kuttner gives short shrift. For instance, the Democrats have hardly been helped by the widely held perception—often an accurate one—that the party is soft on crime. And to suggest that the tax-spend-elect formula can work as well today as it did during the Depression seems nostalgic. Now that government spending is 38 percent of GNP, it's no great rallying cry.

Still, Kuttner is basically right to urge the Democrats to talk bread-and-butter. Money resonates in a way that appeals to generational solidarity don't. Baby Boomers want houses, not political ads with Beatles soundtracks. Kuttner doesn't elaborate on it, but his thesis was dramatically borne out by the experience of blacks, who before Franklin Roosevelt's administration had been overwhelmingly Republican. The Democratic party was enemy turf, with even northern liberals like Woodrow Wilson segregating the Civil Service and southern segregationists keep-

**The Life of the Party: Democratic Prospects in 1988 and Beyond.* Robert Kuttner. *Viking, $18.95.*

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ing FDR from supporting anything so benign as an antilynching bill. Yet blacks, by the 1936 election, were pouring into the Democratic camp. The sway of government assistance, such as the WPA, proved more compelling than the memory of Lincoln.

Not surprisingly, then, Kuttner makes a strong case that the Democratic party should do more to enlist poor voters. In the 1980 presidential election, 73.8 percent of people with incomes of $25,000 and over actually voted, but only 48.8 percent of those with incomes between $5,000 and $9,999 cast votes. Homeowners went to the polls at almost twice the rate of renters. True, politicians such as Mario Cuomo and Jesse Jackson have tried registration drives on a large scale and have met with mixed success. (Those who had never bothered to register didn't find the enthusiasm to go to the polls. Those who did vote were usually, but not predictably, Democratic.) Still, Kuttner is persuasive in his claim that if they were recruited, not just by petitioners at supermarkets but with a strong economic appeal, even those poor Americans who are likely to vote Republican, like evangelicals, might be brought into the Democratic fold. And don't think Americans are so affluent that the numbers of lower-income voters can be ignored. As recently as 1983, 38 percent of American families had incomes of less than $15,000. The poor are the Democratic equivalent of Prudhoe Bay oil—difficult to tap but potentially rich.

Cranston's banker

If Kuttner has good things to say about bringing the poor into the party, he has even better things to say about kicking corporate freeloaders out. He seems to take special delight in skewering liberals turned lobbyists and the hundreds of PACs (3 to 1 corporate over labor and liberal) that shape public policy. This is Kuttner at his best. Many critics on the left can't write about business interests without lapsing into conspiracy theories. Kuttner is a liberal critic. But he is subtle, and all the more devastating. What is insidious about PACs, he says, is not that they simply buy influence, but that they sever the party from its ideological mission of helping the poor. "The Democrats' cash crisis and their identity crisis are happening simultaneously and they are hard to disentangle," writes Kuttner. "Between 1933 and 1968, Democratic money was not at odds with most of the Democratic platform." The checks came from unions, small contributors, and a few wealthy liberals, most of them Jewish. Today, the party gets piles of cash from corporations urging it to help them, not the poor. The new Democratic financiers are PACs like the Hughes Aircraft Company Active Citizenship Fund and the civic-minded Committee for Responsible Government, sponsored by the Nevada Bankers Association. "Because too many private-sector plans had to be greased to buy continuing support for the program," writes Kuttner, "social housing, American-style, is more of a bonanza for developers than for tenants."

To his credit, Kuttner is not squeamish about taking on liberal politicians whose policies he often admires. Kuttner, who is a former Senate Banking Committee staff member, recalls how the staff of Senator Alan Cranston took cues from campaign contributors, such as the Realtors, the Savings and Loan League, and the American Bankers Association. And he has a nice sketch of that man of the people, Charles Manatt, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee who, before leaving his post, lobbied for a provision in the tax code called "Safe Harbor Leasing" (translation: the sale of tax shelters).

A special jab is aimed at Tony Coelho, the House Majority Whip and former chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Under his tenure, PAC contributions grew 15-fold. One congressman said Coelho delayed votes "lest members be put in the awkward position of voting on the interests of businesses that Coelho was shaking down for campaign money." Fortunately, Kuttner offers a way out of the PAC trap, including forcing broadcasters to provide free airtime and free postage to candidates, thereby making money less important, and a 100 percent tax credit for small contributors who live in the same state as a candidate.

Unfortunately, in his business-bashing Kuttner goes too far, all but suggesting that the Democratic party become like the British Labor Party and organize itself completely along class lines. "Democrats can regain their status as the majority party only by rebuilding a majority coalition of ordinary, wage- and salary-earning people whose political and economic interests are not identical to those of the wealthy." But sometimes those interests do coincide. The Democratic party should be for business insurgents and entrepreneurs. The party shouldn't dish out dubious tax breaks and subsidies to major corporations, but it should have a set of policies aimed at encouraging the entrepreneur.

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Kuttner dismisses this, saying that entrepreneurs are already well-organized and don't need help from the Democrats. But Washington's business lobbies, groups ranging from the Chamber of Commerce to the American Frozen Food Institute, rarely champion the cause of entrepreneurs. Their membership rolls include gigantic corporations and asset-shufflers. These lobbies can be counted on to fight for government favors, many of them wasteful, for their most established members. They cannot be trusted to fight for good programs to help their less influential but most creative members. In Washington, the voice of the entrepreneur is rarely heard above the chorus of the entrenched business establishment.

"Most entrepreneurs have lousy politics," Kuttner told *Mother Jones* in 1985. Entrepreneurs may well oppose Democrats on questions of social reform. But who cares? So long as the entrepreneur is the only one who can create the wealth necessary to fund social reform, he should be embraced by the Democrats.

While Kuttner rails at corporate interests for raiding the U.S. treasury and turning the party's attention away from the downtrodden, he can't bring himself to criticize universal entitlement programs like Social Security that similarly siphon money to those who don't need it. In fact, entitlements are the bigger culprits. In 1968, the federal government spent $46 billion on social programs without regard to need. By 1986, it was $400 billion. He admits that "in theory, targeting social spending to the certifiably poor would make for a more efficient as well as a more equitable welfare state." But he argues that Social Security is a work of "genius" that manages to help the poor precisely by putting them in the same category as the middle class, which provides the lobbying power to ensure that the program escapes the ax of budgetary pressures or mean conservatives.

There is little doubt that the program's middle-class consituency provides it with political armor. When President Reagan suggested Social Security cuts in 1981, he was defeated 96 to 0 in the same Senate that had just shaved billions from needs-tested programs. But Kuttner is wrong to contend that the poor would be shafted by giving the middle class a smaller take. First, it can be done in stages. Right now, half of Social Security benefits are taxed, something that would have been unthinkable as recently as a decade ago. Yet there has been no discernible drop in the program's support. Kuttner himself says that full taxation of Social Security benefits is a good idea. If that doesn't erode the political constituency, then why would denying benefits to those who earn more than, say, $50,000? Kuttner frets that those one dollar below a cutoff point would receive no aid. But this is absurd. Benefits could be doled out over a range of incomes, just as taxes are collected over a range of incomes.

Kuttner also makes the "hurt-feelings" argument against means-testing, charging that it would lead to "invasive procedures and other indignities" for poor people. Kuttner, I'm sure, would have few problems with intrusive safety inspections or a tax audit. What is so wrong with making sure that the recipients of a program who are supposed to be poor really are? Besides, we should level with the poor and honestly acknowledge their plight rather than pretend it isn't so.

It would be one thing if Kuttner touted entitlements simply as good policy. But he goes so far as to claim that they have a great civic purpose—binding Americans into a single community. At one point he likens them to universal public education. Why means test one and not the other? The answer is simple. For all their faults, public schools really are places where kids of different stripes mingle, immigrants become acculturated, common values and a shared history are instilled, and so on. What solidarity is there in everyone cashing their government-green Social Security check on the fifteenth of the month?

Taxing just 85 percent of Social Security benefits would save $20 billion per year. A means test would obviously save many billions more. And that would be money available for the poor. Kuttner may see that as hopelessly naive and say that the constituency for poor people would dissolve. But it is naive to go on as we are. Huge, universal entitlement programs crowd out other things that we as a nation need to do. As Peter Peterson, a former secretary of commerce, wrote in the *Atlantic*: "This growth in entitlements over the past 21 years is equivalent to 6.1 percent of GNP—an amount greater than the entire investment we currently make in all business plant and equipment, plus all civilian R&D, plus all infrastructure." If a politician can point to more worthwhile programs the savings would be put toward—radically improving the public schools and repairing crumbling roads—it's not impossible to sell entitlement cuts.

It seems there are odd limits to Kuttner's vision of class warfare. While he is willing to sound the trumpets against business, he is loath to

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challenge wealthy individuals. He's perfectly willing to see them stay on the dole for Social Security and other entitlements. And he certainly won't insist that they sully their hands by doing their fair share of military service. Some populist.

The defense of entitlements is just one problem with the "bucket of coal and turkey"—reward the constituencies—Democratic party that Kuttner wants. It rewards organized constituencies, not those who are really poor. Kuttner says that it is possible to do both. In his trickle-down view, you help the constituencies and everyone gets helped. But those at the bottom, without brokers, can get shafted. For example, the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires that public service workers be paid union-scale wages, makes it all but impossible to launch a public works program that would help the disadvantaged.

Kuttner knows perfectly well how bureaucracy can keep well-intentioned programs from working. (He has, for instance, written for *The Washington Monthly* about the failure of the Pentagon to enforce its antidiscrimination programs.) But this new book barely mentions the countless hassles that Americans experience when they do so much as file their 1040. In fact, he chides critics of the civil service for bureaucrat-bashing and demoralizing our public employees. But he doesn't seem to understand that if liberals aren't willing to take on government's faults, conservatives will be more than happy to step into the breach.

A public that sees Superfund reserves sitting idle, Bradley Fighting Vehicles that sink, Guaranteed Student Loans that don't get repaid, and GS-9s who don't work after four p.m. is a tad wary about funding what we have, let alone the Kuttner Agenda. Republicans, who with few exceptions are more wary of the state, can afford to smile and watch the gears grind. Democrats can't. More importantly, the programs liberals believe in won't work and won't help the disadvantaged unless something is done to repair the bureaucracy. For an example one need only look at Washington, D.C.'s Department of Human Services which spends almost $3,000 a month to house a single homeless family in a dilapidated motel.

Learning from Canarsie

No doubt some working class voters can be drawn into the party solely through the economic appeals that Kuttner advocates. But not all issues

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have dollars and cents attached to them and not everyone, to put it crudely, can be bought. With his expertise in economics, Kuttner seems to forget that. Democrats will have to go after working-class voters with more than dollars. They'll have to take on issues, such as crime and affirmative action, that Kuttner would have them "downplay."

In Canarsie, Brooklyn, a community of hard-hats, teachers, and clerks living in modest houses, the loyalties are still nominally Democratic, but the party's grasp on the Jews and Italians in this neighborhood is, at best, tenuous. Jonathan Rieder settled in the community a few years ago to write about its fears—that America was becoming a sucker in the world, that blacks were encroaching in nearby tenaments, and that the community was losing its way. Listening to Canarsians, it's hard to see how their exodus from the Democratic party would be halted solely with fatter checks. As Rieder wrote in his book *Canarsie*, their concerns centered on "busing, tipping [racial] neighborhoods, crime in the streets, scatter-sight low-income housing, judicial leniency, the safety of schools, white flight, and the death penalty." These are the issues that Canarsians talk about on Flatlands Avenue and at meetings of the Knights of Columbus and none of them "fit neatly into the familiar categories of the New Deal party system."

To stake out the moral high ground, the Democrats will have to find a vision of community larger than Kuttner's bucket of coal and turkey. They'll have to convince those Canarsians that they are determined to protect them from criminal violence, while insisting on their commitment to helping those left behind—whether it's funding drug clinics or accepting fair housing.

The candidate who can embrace, not shun, divisive social issues and address them in the parlance of religion and values sincerely and specifically (not just by passing out flags at the Democratic convention as did the aides of Walter Mondale) will go a long way toward taking back the mantle of patriotism that so many Americans still feel belongs to Ronald Reagan. The candidate who can do all this and take on business interests as Robert Kuttner would will be more than electable or even a good Democrat. He'll be a great president, too. □

What Robert Kennedy could teach today's Democrats

. . . And Start Helping the Underclass

by Jason DeParle

Lafeyette Walton lives in a Chicago housing project. He is 12 years old. On his birthday last summer he headed across the project lawn with eight dollars in his pocket, aiming to buy a radio. Then the sound of gunfire intruded, and Lafeyette crawled back home to safety.

Jason DeParle is an editor of The Washington Monthly.

Gunfire is a sound familiar to him. In the apartment where Lafeyette lives with his mother and his five siblings, the curtains have bullet holes. He's seen two children shot and watched one die on his doorstep. His brother, Pharoah, shakes uncontrollably at loud noises.

The Wall Street Journal told Lafeyette's now-famous story in October, as six Democratic can-

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didates traveled the country, met in debate, and offered their vision of America's future. They've said a lot about the farm crisis, debt crisis, and trade crisis, and they've trumpeted their leadership and their character. But there hasn't been much said about Lafeyette Walton's crisis, and the crises of millions of others like him. The enduring miseries of inner-city blacks is one of America's greatest problems; why won't the candidates confront it?

By way of contrast, it is useful to remember the presidential campaign that Robert Kennedy began 20 years ago. In its three-month span, Kennedy repeatedly challenged Americans to do something about what he called "the inexcusable and ugly deprivations" of the nascent black underclass. Kennedy got people to listen by combining genuine anger about poverty, which poor blacks understood, with an image of toughness that appealed to conservative whites. He pestered the affluent and the underclass each to take responsibility. As a result, his support included not only blacks and Hispanics but also whites whose second choice for president was George Wallace. Kennedy fashioned the original rainbow coalition and was proving its viability in the primaries when he was shot.

Admittedly, it's harder in some ways for today's candidates to take up an antipoverty crusade. Kennedy had tanks on his side. It's easier to inject a sense of urgency when the cities are filled with rioters. Today the Japanese salary man has replaced angry urban blacks as the focus of American anxiety. With most middle-class Americans happily insulated from the realities of the Waltons' world, these truly are invisible men. It's Lafeyette Walton who's getting shot at, not us.

Meanwhile, most Americans think we've already done enough. In the popular mind, too much money had been spent, too little has resulted, and further effort seems futile. What organized political anger does exist no longer flows out of the ghetto, but rather in the other direction, rich against poor. At the same time, the image of the poor has changed. When Kennedy began speaking out about poverty, the image that encapsulated black deprivation was that of school children facing police dogs and jeering crowds. Now it's the stud of Bill Moyers's documentary, who fathered six children by four women and supported none of them. "Well the majority of the mothers are on welfare," he said. "What I'm not doing, the government does." Any politician trying to quicken the American conscience has a tough image to fight: the poor *seem* less deserving.

The miseries of the black inner city are especially bitter, as William Julius Wilson reminds us,* for they increased "during the very period in which the most sweeping anti-discrimination legislation... [was] enacted and implemented." Since 1969, the percentage of black men earning more than $25,000 has grown steadily, but so has the proportion earning less than $5,000. While the movement that crossed the bridge in Selma catapulted millions of blacks into the mainstream of American life, you couldn't prove it by Lafeyette Walton. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson attempts to explain why.

Industrial evacuation

He begins with the facts. Consider the Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago's largest housing project. Its 28 brick high rises cover 92 acres and hold about 25,000 people. All of them are black. The average family income in this mini-city, Wilson reports, is $5,470. Ninety-three percent of the families with children are headed by a single parent. Eighty-three percent rely on AFDC payments. Unemployment hangs at about 50 percent. Worst of all: although the project contains about a half-percent of the city's population, it accounts for 11 percent of its murders, 9 percent of its rapes, and 10 percent of its aggravated assaults. Wilson stresses that the rise of communities like this one is something new in America and insists that the word *underclass* is the right term to describe it. "One cannot deny that there is a heterogenous grouping of inner-city families and individuals whose behavior contrasts sharply with that of mainstream America," he says. Liberals who shrink from the word *underclass* for terms like *lower class* or *working class* "fail to address one of the most important social transformations in recent United States history."

The explosion of crime, pregnant teenagers, and broken families has proved a tough topic for liberals to discuss. The violent denunciations of the Moynihan report made the disintegration of the black family a taboo topic. In the aftermath, liberal arguments ranged from denials that an underclass existed to defenses of matriarchal society to blaming it all on tenacious racism. Conservatives filled the void by pointing to individual sloth or arguing that the government was to blame; welfare policies had encouraged

**The Truly Disadvantaged.* William Julius Wilson. *University of Chicago Press, $19.95.*

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dependency, they said, and softness on crime loosened the strictures on aberrant behavior. The process of liberal intellectual recovery is now well on its way. Wilson, a black sociologist from the University of Chicago and a social democrat, seeks to help it along.

The problem of the black underclass, Wilson argues, has its roots and its solution in economics. It began with the great urban migration that filled cities with unskilled black newcomers through most of the 1960s. During the economic boom that followed World War II, these migrants found solid if unglamorous jobs in factories, freight yards, and on docks. As the manufacturing economy declined and the service economy rose, those jobs began to disappear. The "help wanted" signs not only moved to the suburbs but began demanding college diplomas. And the recessions of the 1970s made good jobs even tougher to find. The effects of unemployment were particularly severe in the black inner city, Wilson argues, because migration left the population disproportionately young and therefore more easily tempted to crime, pregnancy, and welfare dependency.

Wilson, who builds his case with data from Census tracts and Labor Department abstracts, depicts this economic shift in the dust-dry prose of academics. (He packs the words *trichotomizing*, *plurality*, and *modal* into a single sentence.) A more vivid description of what these changes meant to the man on the sidewalk can be found in the *Chicago Tribune*'s lengthy 1985 series on the underclass. The Chicago community of North Lawndale, for example, was once a magnet for black migrants. In its prime, it boasted a Western Electric factory (43,000 jobs), an International Harvester plant (14,000), and the Sears world headquarters (10,000 jobs). Harvester closed down in the late 1960s, Sears moved downtown, and Western Electric is down to 1,000 jobs. Today North Lawndale's economy contains a bank, a supermarket, 48 state lottery agents, 50 currency exchanges, and 99 bars and liquor stores.

This joblessness, Wilson argues, is the central fact of black inner-city life, the fountain from which other sorrows flow. The lack of jobs leaves inner-city men unable to support families. Female-headed households then grow. And as they do, so does the cycle of educational failure, crime, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, and further poverty. It's not welfare or racism that's decimated Lafeyette Walton's world, though Wilson argues those factors may have sped its collapse. Ultimately, it's unemployment.

During this industrial evacuation, Wilson argues, a second development compounded the problems of the inner city: the black middle class left. From the great postwar migrations through most of the 1960s, racial segregation left the ghettos economically integrated. They were homes to hustlers and thieves but also to doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, and ministers. When the triumphs of the civil rights movement allowed the black bourgeoisie to leave, two things happened. The institutions of neighborhood life—schools, churches, fraternities—lost their foundations. And the neighborhoods lost their most important role models. Previously, even the children of an unemployed father could look to their neighbors and see a connection between hard work and material reward. No more. The men with alarm clocks moved out and the drug dealers stayed behind.

Wilson argues that without these role models, there was nothing "to keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception." With this social transformation of the ghetto, "joblessness as a way of life takes on a different social meaning...a vicious cycle is perpetuated...."

It is here that Wilson begins to fidget. Having acknowledged a cultural component to the decomposition of the black inner city, he is quick to de-emphasize it. He emphatically rejects the term "culture of poverty" to describe ghetto mores and substitutes his own phrase, "social isolation." The difference, key in Wilson's mind, is that culture of poverty theorists emphasize the extent to which bad values take on a life of their own. By contrast, he wants these behavior patterns to be seen as the result of truncated economic opportunity. As the economy gets better, he argues, postive values will emerge.

But Wilson concedes that it would be "dogmatic" to rule out the possibility that "some cultural traits may in fact take on a life of their own for a period of time...." And he approvingly quotes Herbert Gans, that in the acrimonious debate on the primacy of culture versus economics, the truth probably "lies somewhere in between." Unemployment breeds dependency and dependency helps guarantee more unemployment. By Wilson's own analysis, cultural forces are clearly at work and are an important element of inner-city life.

The reasons for this delicate dance become

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clear when Wilson leaves behind his description of how the underclass arose and tackles the question of what to do about it. Provide jobs, he says: "I have in mind the creation of a macroeconomic policy designed to promote both economic growth and a tight labor market." His reform package carries other suggestions too, as supplemental measures: job training to help the underclass capitalize on an improved labor market; a national standard for welfare benefits; work incentives for welfare recipients; aid to two-parent families; continued affirmative action programs; a universal child support and child care program, similar to those offered in European democracies. But he means to keep the focus on the economy. Economic opportunties create values, is the implicit message of his argument, not the other way around.

Sneak attack

After a persuasive explanation of what's gone wrong in the inner city, the way Wilson soft-peddles the questions of culture doesn't quite satisfy. He is right to stress the need for a better job market. But Vietnamese and other Asian immigrants also face a tough job market, often with the added barrier of language, and typically fare better. Walking across Cambodia and learning to speak English is certainly as formidable a set of obstacles as catching a bus to the suburbs. And while there may not be enough jobs for all the residents of the inner city, there still are some that get passed by. Grab a Washington, D.C. cab and listen to the driver. Chances are he'll tell you in Ethiopian or Turkish or Jamaican accents of his recent arrival and embrace of economic opportunity. While Wilson acknowledges that values affect advancement, his argument that bad values will melt in the face of a good economy is unconvincing.

Wilson's call for fuller employment is important, but so are other calls he declines to make with much vigor. If the relationship between culture and economics is in fact a dynamic one, then the war for better inner-city lives can be fought on more than one front. Throughout the country there are parochial schools that equip ghetto children with the habits and determination needed to escape. Public schools can be pushed in their direction. There are also welfare recipients who state plainly that welfare policies instill apathy. "It makes me lazy," said one of the candid subjects of the Moyers documentary. Work incentives can be strengthened. Anticrime measures—more police, quicker prosecutions—can be boosted. Programs like Head Start, a clear success story, can be copied and expanded. Wilson doesn't deny the usefulness of these reforms. He just doesn't give them much prominence.

In part, it's a matter of political strategy. Wilson calls his plan for full employment and universal benefits like child allowances "a hidden agenda." Straightforward appeals to help the black underclass won't travel very far in the current political climate, he argues, and need to be wrapped in a more enticing garment. He is right in his assessment of the political mood. Among his various successes, Ronald Reagan has helped assuage the guilt most Americans might feel about neglecting the poor. But in that atmosphere, even Wilson's call for fuller employment is unlikely to find success. Reagan won a sweeping reelection in 1984 with unemployment at more than 7 percent.

It's hard to imagine beating the problems of the underclass with a sneak attack. More likely it'll take a frontal assault, led by a politician with the anger and the credibility to challenge the reign of apathy. It can't be done by ignoring values, but rather by appealing to them. That's where

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Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign is instructive.

Plain talk

Kennedy's successes in the primaries can't be dismissed as a quirk of the times or of his charismatic name. Both helped. But if he had the momentum of a socially active decade behind him, he also faced a headwind of conservative reaction. After all, Richard Nixon won in the fall. And while other issues, like his opposition to the Vietnam war, were essential to his candidacy, his pronouncements on poverty played an increasingly prominent role, particularly after Lyndon Johnson withdrew. When he won the Indiana primary, he grabbed 85 percent of the black vote *and* captured all seven counties that had gone for Wallace four years earlier.

Kennedy's appeal rested in a combination of his concern and his credibility. He expressed outrage at the conditions of migrant camps and New York tenements. Yet he also had the inheritance of his experience as a prosecutor behind him and a reputation for "ruthlessness" that made him seem tough. After all, Kennedy came to national prominence by putting someone in jail (Jimmy Hoffa) and by being his brother's tough-guy campaign manager. Even his body language reinforced the image of toughness: flat stomach, 50-mile hikes, dives in the cold sea. No pear-shaped Stevenson egghead was he.

While Kennedy was in many ways a conventional politician willing to make the rubber-chicken rounds, he also had a penchant for blurting out unpopular things. When he did, he didn't speak the language of hidden agendas, as Wilson would suggest, but that of social responsibility.

In Indiana, Kennedy went before a group of medical students to talk of "intolerable conditions attributable...to the neglect and indifference of men."

"Where are you going to get the money for these federally subsidized programs you're talking about?" asked one student.

"From you," Kennedy shot back.

(Picture the same scene being replayed in the current campaign. Jackson: "From the Pentagon." Dukakis: "From better tax collection." Gephardt: "From reductions in the trade imbalance.")

Kennedy also talked plainly about race, not couching his antipoverty appeals in the universal language of employment.

"Let me say something about the tone of these questions," he continued with the medical students. "I look around this room and I don't see many black faces who will become doctors....You are the privileged ones here. It's easy to sit back and say it's the fault of the federal government, but it's our responsibility, too. It's our society, not just our government."

Heard any candidates saying that to the AMA recently? During the same campaign, Kennedy began a breakfast meeting with 150 women in Terre Haute with a typical glad-to-be-here speech. By the end, irked at their complacency, he spoke what was on his mind. "I am stunned," he said, "by the lack of awareness of the rest of us toward [the poor] and their problems."

Kennedy didn't save his challenges for medical students or the ladies of the garden club. When he went to Watts, he talked not just about racial injustice, but about law and order too. "I tell you here in California the same thing I told those in Alabama with whom I talked," he said. "The gulf between our people will not be bridged by those who preach violence, or by those who burn and loot...such anarchy is intolerable."

Similarly, when Kennedy unveiled his antipoverty program in Bedford Stuyvesant, he again invoked the language of values and responsibility. He brought a formidable phalanx of Establishment support with him. I.M. Pei helped with the neighborhood design; IBM relocated a plant and offered jobs. But in talking to the residents, Kennedy stressed that the responsibility for community uplift remained their own. "Only you can mobilize the workers, enlist the young people in training programs, induce others to continue or resume their education...." he said. "Always there will be work—ceaseless, untiring effort."

What the current presidential campaign needs is someone willing to say similar things—to challenge the complacent middle America to help the underclass while challenging the underclass to help itself.

Jesse Jackson sometimes comes close. He deserves credit for his fire and for his willingness to tell inner-city kids to study and avoid drugs and pregnancy. But there's also the scent of the demagogue about him, whether in rushing off to the "Today Show" with Martin Luther King's blood on his shirt or jetting off to the latest world hot spot. And his racist remarks call his own values into question, and leave him unable to speak to the exliberals who have floated off in the Reagan tide and need to be pulled back ashore.

While the candidates duck the challenge, Lafeyette Walton waits. □

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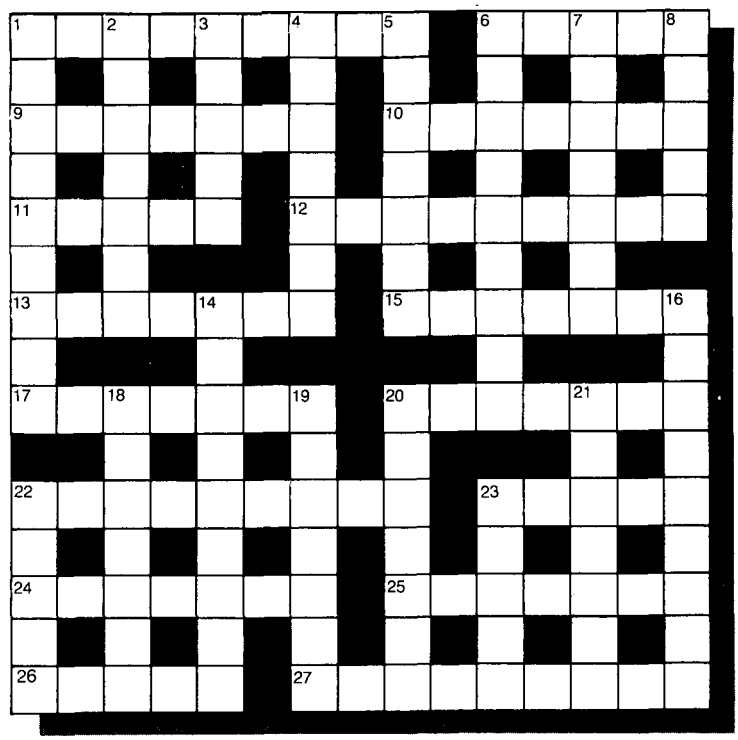
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. 1988 aspirants make the lead come back after danger begins. (9)
6. Event celebrating 25th segment? (5)
9. Mixture of Laura and Tennessee is effortless. (7)
10. Soldier made Tip rave. (7)
11. Enterprise displaying street mineral. (5)
12. Exaggerated wildly, voted race. (9)
13. One ripens carefully to encourage. (7)
15. One of three taboos is sort of splendid at the start. (7)
17. Put down headquarter clues systematically. (7)
20. Notwithstanding treatment, pet dies. (7)
22. Go along with General Electric? (9)
23. Sea crane ends declaration. (5)
24. 100 tilt in one direction to free the spirit. (7)
25. Studied oration in Canada. (7)
26. Words and sentences. (5)
27. Male speech once in a while adopted by candidates. (9)

DOWN

1. Leading families mix stain in dyes. (9)
2. Mods in the altered manners of operation. (7)
3. Bend preserve around five. (5)
4. Bewildered lone gal is out of it. (3,4)
5. Our species as pines variety. (7)
6. Colors for this season, this year. (9)
7. Cat wandering in plant growth came back. (7)
8. Produce stirred idly around Easter. (5)
14. Clarifies null miles array. (9)
16. Choices about clone site. (9)
18. Questionable matter in carbuncle artificially removed. (7)
19. Greet brew before exclamation in Florida. (7)
20. District attorney confuses Tony with article for 500 in Florida. (7)
21. Contrary poetry? (7)
22. Modified tie for coats? Just the opposite! (5)
23. Stamped late rising around beginning of thunder. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Trump: The Art of the Deal. Donald J. Trump, Tony Schwartz. *Random House, $19.95. Here's the deal. You pay a company totally independent of me a nominal fee, I give you a full accounting of what I've done (so far). I take all the risk here. Your risk is what, $19.95, drinks at the Grand Hyatt or maybe the Trump Parc or the Trump Plaza. Anyway, my upside isn't even the money. I receive an unbelievably tiny percentage, so small I'd be embarrassed to admit it here (my dad might find out). No, all I'm hoping for is that a few of you around the nation will see me for what I am. An effective man. Of exquisite taste. Compassionate. A perfectionist who at a time of grotesque governmental incompetence could easily take on, that's right, national responsibility. . . .*

While reading the 41-year-old's autobiography, I kept hearing Trump issue that wheedling proposal between the smooth, co-written lines on the page. The book stands as a monument to Trump's enormous shrewdness and self-regard. Like his other monuments, it bears his name and is decorated in marble and gilt—marble-printed endpapers, a gold-faced jacket that takes longer than the book to manufacture. This is a book you can tell by its cover. Trump is showing off what he's worth and thereby advertising the saddest effect of pure capitalism on personality: the person as product. And now Trump is selling to a larger market. He wants a national image, but not the one he's got in New York as a ruthless arriviste.

Among other things, Trump wants to be considered an artist. Money's status is plainly sinking, and Trump is scrambling for a lifeboat. It irritates him that architecture critics are accorded cultural esteem while casino operators and real estate developers have little. He protests that he doesn't do it for the moolah, but for creative fulfillment. "Other people paint beautifully on canvas or write wonderful poetry. I like making deals," he writes at the start.

The stories that follow don't exactly bolster Trump's case. "The relevant issue. . . [is] what I get to keep," he says. Or, "skyscrapers are machines for making money." Ditto, casinos. Chapters end with eight-digit sums of what he netted. The serrated contour of the Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, Trump informs us, is not some avant-garde architectural conceit, but a means of maximizing windowed walls so he can charge even more for apartments.

Even when Trump's giving it away he's trying to make it. In one episode, he rescues an "adorable little lady" in Georgia from farm foreclosure after her husband commits suicide. Trump leads a collection for $100,000, then presents the check. But consider: that farmwoman was Tom Brokaw's story; NBC put Trump in touch with her; and while Trump was raising the $100,000, he was urging NBC to relocate its headquarters to his Television City site in New York. The whole foreclosure charade was a way of impressing NBC. No dice; NBC stayed in condo-less Rockefeller Plaza.

Trump's no artist, he's art*ful*. His gift is lining up the many sides of a deal by "jiggling provisional commitments." He avoids risk, seldom tells the whole truth, and likes to put no money down. He can employ strongarm pressure or back off laughing. By casual feints, he gets people to sign letters of intent they will regret.

It's a craft for the media age—using the press to panic politicians and rivals. We see Trump "hyping my plans to the press but in reality getting nowhere," or showcasing an ugly "as-of-right" model of a building in order to say, "This is all I could build the way things stand." By such manipulations, Trump has frequently won big tax breaks from New York's politicians.

These antics are further marred by Trump's concealments. *Manhattan, inc.* has pointed out that his version of what he did to tenants who blocked his plans for a glass tower on Central Park South is mild compared to the ugly reality. Then there's his apology for destroying the Bonwit building's prized friezes, which he had promised to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Trump says preserving the friezes would have cost him hundreds of thousands in weeks of delays on the Trump Tower—a ridiculous assertion from the man who, in the blink of an eye (and, yes, amazingly) built an iceskating rink that the city government had bungled for more than five years. (Besides, a spokesman said at the time that saving the friezes would have cost $32,000.) Trump's "regret" over the Bonwit incident ("I was too young. . .") is further undercut by his three-word mention of "certain iron grillwork" he also promised the Met. In fact, this was a 15-by-25 foot nickel Art Deco piece that Trump ordered cut up (and presumably sold). So much for the art of the deal.

And the consequences of these deals? Some are truly beneficial (jobs, revitalization) but in large part they result in the creation of luxury apartments on public subsidy and gaming halls that appeal to people's most pathetic motives. Trump shows little interest in such questions of social responsibility. There's no real concern with other people in this book. Reflective bits make him squeamish. "Growing Up" takes 11 pages, including a glimpse of the wreckage of an older brother, dead at 43, who didn't meet his developer dad's (or developer brother's) expectations and turned to drink: ". . .the pressures of our particular family were not for him," Trump says, hurrying on to the deals.

And the future? Reined in, Trump might make an effective public servant: the next Democratic administration could call him on his promise to give something back and appoint him to head a Works Project Administration or build a bullet train. But then, it's hard to see Richard Gephardt reining in the megalomaniacal Trump, a guy who once gave his second-grade music teacher a black eye after deciding he knew more than the teacher about music. As for elective office, it would be crazy to give it to Trump

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for the very reason (admirably again) that he won't take his companies public—he wants to make his own decisions. Thus my recommendation: no deal.

—*Philip Weiss*

The Strangelove Legacy: Children, Parents and Teachers in the Nuclear Age. Phyllis La Farge. *Harper and Row, $15.95*. Remember the scene in *Annie Hall* where Woody Allen, then an adolescent, tells his family psychiatrist that the world will end in nuclear annihilation? Two decades worth of studies suggest that he spoke for more than a few scrawny kids in Brooklyn. Vast majorities of children claim to share his fear of nuclear war, and increasing numbers—a third of high school seniors, according to one poll—say they'll perish in one.

So what's a nucleo-neurotic kid to do? The debate over how to teach nuclear war to kids grew up right alongside the nuclear freeze movement during Reagan's first term. In 1983, the Massachusetts branch of the National Education Association teamed up with the Union of Concerned Scientists to produce "Choices"—a package of teaching materials that provided graphic detail of how many would be killed in a nuclear war. The American Federation of Teachers criticized the packet, as did President Reagan, who said the guide had the effect of "frightening and brainwashing American schoolchildren."

La Farge takes the left flank. A contributing editor of *Parents* magazine, she takes us to the kind of classrooms she would like to see teach kids about nuclear war, including a workshop at the 92nd Street "Y" in New York, where a circle of atom-anxious girls are "embracing the tiger." The leader tells them to imagine something they fear, then to "embrace it, draw it in, rest [their] hands on its shoulders." Next they pretend that they're holding the world—which proves too heavy for most of the girls, until the leader encourages them to scale things down. "For some," La Farge writes, "[the world] became no bigger than a tennis ball, lovingly cradled."

For La Farge these exercises are important avenues to "empowerment." Most children are so numbed by the nuclear threat that they've lost faith in their ability to affect it. "Nuclear-age education" should replace "survivalist" mentality and convince teens that they can still make a difference in an age of Stealth bombers, Midgetmen missiles, and Trident submarines.

But this conversion may require more than an imaginary communion with a jungle cat. La Farge calls on parents and teachers to explicitly convey the "destructiveness" of nuclear weapons. She argues strongly that this is apolitical, that

"Send it to your favorite politician in place of a campaign contribution."

—Robert B. Reich
John F. Kennedy School of Government

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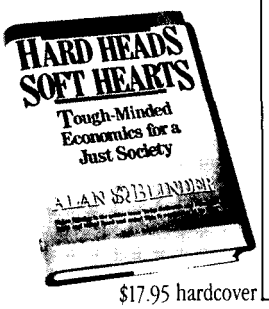

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it will allow children to decide for themselves the best way to prevent nuclear war. "The American ideal of freedom makes it unacceptable to inculcate a particular political viewpoint in the classroom," La Farge admits. But while this sounds like a neutral approach, it's not. If teachers discuss only the dangers of nuclear war, but do not, for instance, give mention to deterrence, then we've hardly enhanced students' capacity for independent thought. All we've done is frighten them. A balanced nuclear curriculum would include Jonathan Schell *and* Richard Perle.

Whatever her biases, La Farge does make it clear that our nuclear education is woefully inadequate. Recently, I discovered that several of my brighter students thought INF was a football league and "deterrent" a laundry cleaner. The problem begins at home, La Farge writes, where the nuclear subject is so "anxiety-laden" that parents won't raise it. But parents and children rarely discuss even the most mundane public problems. I don't know many dads who sit junior on their lap for a father-and-son talk about reducing the deficit. There's no particular taboo on nuclear issues. Of course we should spend more time with our children talking about nuclear weapons—and a host of other divisive questions they'll have to face. We should spend more time with them, period.

—*Jonathan Zimmerman*

Rachel and Her Children. Jonathan Kozol. *Crown, $16.95.* Homelessness in America has become *the* issue of the 1980s. Hollywood celebrities lead sleep-ins on heating grates, bag-lady-chic is the latest in clothing, and Lily Tomlin has added an impersonation of a street person to her comedy routine. And at upscale dinner parties only AIDS challenges homelessness as the issue of discussion between the couscous and chicken cordon bleu.

Kozol's purpose is to describe the "sad realities" of homeless families and insofar as this is his *only* purpose, he succeeds. The visual images evoked by Kozol include the young boy who slept in a Goodwill box from age 9 to 14 until he was no longer small enough to fit through the box's deposit slot; the man, woman, and child asleep in a single telephone booth in New York City; a little girl reporting how "Mr. Rat came in my baby sister's crib and bit her;" and Rachel herself, a homeless mother in New York, who pleads with Kozol: "Can you get the government to know that we exist?" Such images remain with the reader long after the book is put down.

Kozol is unable, however, to move beyond these images. He states categorically that, "the cause of homelessness is lack of housing." Nobody will dispute that gentrification and urban redevelopment of inner cities have produced a dramatic decline in low-cost housing. The policies of the Reagan administration, determined to get the federal government out of the housing business, have further exacerbated this crisis. But the problem of homelessness is more than simply lack of housing. It is also inextricably intertwined with a lack of job training, with an extraordinarily bureaucratized welfare system, and with national policies which have left 21 percent of our nation's children living below the poverty level. (Among major industrialized nations, only Australia rivals the United States in the number of its children who live in poverty.)

Because Kozol does not address broader issues than the lack of housing, his proposed solutions are unsatisfactory. Perhaps Kozol sensed this himself and for that reason relegated his suggestions to an appendix. Increasing the availability of low-cost housing is essential to solving the homeless problem, but if Rachel and her children were placed in such housing today, they still would suffer. For example, Rachel has been a drug addict, and no one has yet devised a satisfactory strategy for preventing benefits intended for children from being taken by drug-addicted parents.

It should also be noted that Kozol's book is about only one segment of the homeless population—homeless families. Nothing is said about the debacle of deinstitutionalization and the abysmal failure of public psychiatric services which have produced so many disturbed and untreated homeless individuals. Studies in many cities have established that approximately one-third of all homeless individuals are mentally ill—mostly with schizophrenia—and another third are addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. Alcohol and drug addiction play major roles in causing homelessness among families and these addictions gnaw at the solutions proposed to help them.

Kozol would argue that these issues are beyond the scope of his book. He set out to describe an underclass of children which is increasing daily and which is going to grow into an army of illiterate, unemployable, developmentally arrested adults. He quotes admiringly Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. "We are *not* going to get away with this," Moynihan says. The twenty-first century, "is going to punish us." Or as Kozol puts it, "It is the present we must deal with, and the future we must fear."

—*E. Fuller Torrey*

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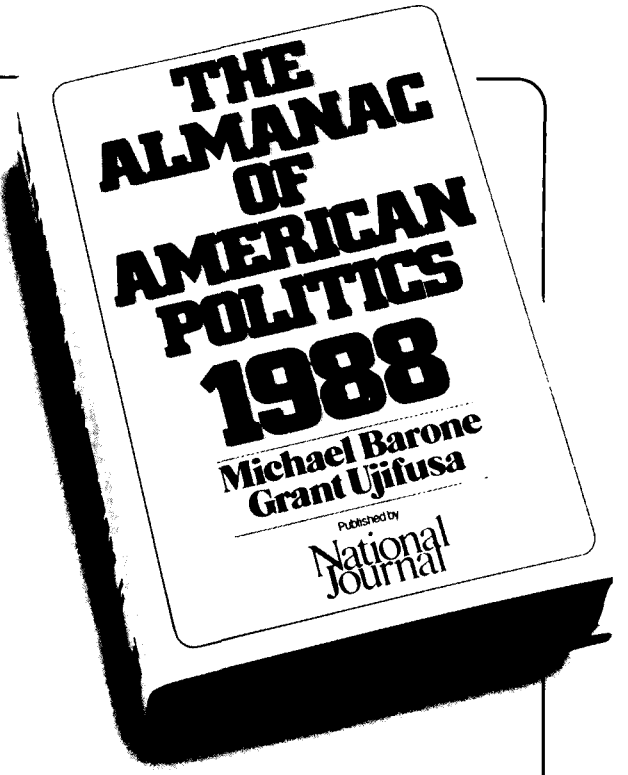

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